

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE STORIES OF ADVENTURE

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THE BOY COURIER OF SIBERIA —(OR)— THE LEAGUE OF THE RUSSIAN PRISON MINES. BY ALLAN ARNOLD. AND OTHER STORIES



But when the leader of the Cossack band dashed forward in advance of his followers, shouting the command which no man in Russia dare disobey, "Halt, in the name of the Czar," Ivan believed he was lost in very deed.

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Stories of Adventure

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THE BOY COURIER OF SIBERIA

— OR —

THE LEAGUE OF THE RUSSIAN PRISON MINES

By ALLAN ARNOLD

CHAPTER I.

THE BOY COURIER OF SIBERIA—THE BLOODHOUND OF THE CZAR.

It was a night in the year 1881. A year of vital interest to the Russian nation, and a period which formed an epoch of supreme importance in the history of the great Muscovite empire of northern Europe and Asia.

Since the vast domain was founded in real greatness by the Czar Ivan, surnamed "the terrible," and subsequent to the reign of "Peter the Great," whose diplomatic skill and iron will still higher elevated the great "winter empire" in the scale of national importance, no more interesting or romantic period finds a record in the annals of Russia.

It was winter when the opening events of the present narrative transpired, and throughout the length and breadth of Russia there were few who dreamed of the great tragedy which was to be enacted in the gay capital before the spring-time came again. But the month of March was to witness the assassination of Alexander II.

The public clocks of St. Petersburg were striking ten, and the fine, soft flakes of snow were falling gently from the clouds upon the city of the Czar.

The cold blue water of the frozen Neva is buried beneath a white canopy—the mantle of winter—and over the entire landscape is cast the white shroud of snow.

The great Russian capital is situated on the banks of the Neva, which forms a delta a few miles before reaching the Gulf of Finland, and on this St. Petersburg is built. The streets are broad and badly paved. In the eastern part are situated the custom house, the exchanges, the fortress and other public buildings. To the northward we see the spires of the Winter Palace, the favorite residence of the Czar, and high above all towers the majestic gilded dome of St. Isaacs.

Away to the westward, beyond the Neva, are the lofty Ural Mountains. The term Ural is the Russian for "a belt," and these mountains form a vast belt, which separates Russia in Europe from Siberia—the land of the prison-mines—the realm of everlasting snow and death, and the exile's terror.

Siberia, as no doubt most of our readers are aware, is the vast tract of country extending from the Ural Mountains to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. It is bounded on the south by Turkestan and the Chinese Empire, and on the north by the Arctic Ocean from the Sea of Kara to Behrings Straits. Siberia is divided into several provinces—Tobolsk, Yeniseisk, Irkutsk, Omsk and Yakutsk.

As the clocks of the Russian capital cease striking the hour of ten a youth is walking rapidly across the Nicholas Bridge. Not more than sixteen or seventeen years have passed over his head, but he presents an appearance beyond his age.

The youth is a perfect type of manly beauty. In form he is the ideal of grace and elegance. He is straight as an arrow, with broad shoulders, slender waist, and every well-developed limb perfectly turned. His features are beautifully regular, and his skin, though dark, is perfectly clear. Eyes

of dark blue, large and brilliant, shaded by long lashes, illuminate his face beneath a broad, intellectual brow, upon which a mass of curling, dark hair clusters. He is attired in a tight-fitting, fur-trimmed jacket, corduroy pantaloons and top-boots. He wears also a fur-lined kaftan and a seal cap.

Advancing from the direction opposite to that which the youth is pursuing is a sleigh drawn by three spirited horses attached to the vehicle in the Russian fashion—that is to say, there is one strong, fast horse in the shafts flanked by a light, loosely attached horse on each side that goes at a gallop. Over the neck of the middle horse is an arch called a "duga," to which is attached a number of bells, which are of real use in the country to frighten wolves and give warning so that collisions may be avoided on the narrow forest paths.

As the sleigh arrived opposite the youth, near the center of the great stone bridge, it came to an abrupt halt, the "yem-schick," or driver, pulling up his team so suddenly, at a command from a man muffled in furs who sat on the rear seat, that the team reared wildly and the "duga bells" jingled a perfect chime.

The youth halted quite involuntarily as the equipage drew up beside him.

The occupant of the sleigh addressed him the instant the vehicle stopped.

"You are Ivan Lavaniski?" demanded the man in the sleigh.

"That is my name, 'sasha.'"

"His highness, the most high born General Mellikoff, the chief of the third section, demands your immediate presence at the department of justice."

"I am at the service of the general."

"Then jump into the sleigh—I was on the way to seek you at your mother's house."

"All right," replied Ivan, readily, and he sprang into the vehicle.

"Now back to the palace, you drone!" ordered the man in the sleigh, and the "yem-schick" whirled his team about with surprising celerity.

As they sped along the snowy street Ivan's companion never once spoke, and the youth did not attempt to enter into a conversation with his companion.

The lad had obtained a glimpse of his face, and he had at once drawn as far away from him as the limit of the vehicle would permit.

Ivan at one glance had recognized the man as one Peter Dorkoff, a notorious informer and spy of "the third section," or secret police.

The other noted the lad's involuntary movement of aversion, and his small black eyes scintillated beneath his bushy brows, and he frowned darkly.

The department of justice—a massive building in which is the office of the celebrated General Mellikoff—is situated at a distance of half a verst from the great Nicholas Bridge, and the distance was soon traversed.

Ivan and the police spy alighted, and ascended the broad stone steps of the grim old palace, and the latter ushered the

youth at once into the presence of the dreaded chief of the "third section."

But Ivan Lavaniski experienced not the slightest sentiment of alarm, for he had often entered the presence of General Mellikoff. The youth was a personage somewhat celebrated. He was the youngest courier in the service of the Czar, and as it was his duty to convey special dispatches from the Russian capital to various portions of Siberia, the lad was called "The Boy Courier of Siberia."

General Mellikoff scarcely noticed the low bow with which the boy courier saluted him as he said:

"I am at your command, general."

Mellikoff waved his hand for Dorkoff to retire, and the fellow obeyed.

"Ivan Lavaniski, you will leave for Siberia before sunrise. Your orders are to travel at post-haste to Irkutsk and deliver this sealed packet to the governor of that city. The package contains dispatches of the greatest importance. Guard it with your life, and deliver it only to the governor," said Mellikoff, in a stern, impressive voice.

"I will obey, sire."

"Here are the dispatches."

Ivan received a large sealed envelope, stamped with the imperial eagle.

He placed it carefully in an inside pocket of his fur jacket.

"And here is the courier special 'podorozhanga,' or permit. The passport, as you know, gives you permission to travel anywhere in Siberia, to call to your assistance the servants of the most noble ruler of all the Russians anywhere. It arms you with power to select the best horses and demand first service at every post-station. In short, it gives you precedence over all other travelers, and since you are in the service of the Czar no one dare refuse to obey your orders."

"Yes, sire."

"It is a great power to be placed in the hands of one so young, but you have in the past proven yourself worthy of all trust."

The boy courier was by no means well pleased at the prospect before him. It was a terrible journey to Irkutsk. Thousands of versts were to be traversed. The dangerous mountain passes were to be threaded, the dark forests penetrated, and over the trackless, wind-swept Khirgez Steppes, strewn with the bones of exiles, he must make his way exposed to all the dangers to which many a brave courier had succumbed and found a grave on the steppes with the glittering snow for his winding-sheet.

But it was not the prospect of danger to be encountered that caused Ivan a feeling of great regret at the thought of leaving Petrograd. It was because he would be separated from his mother, and from one who was very dear to his boyish heart.

Ivan strode rapidly through the almost deserted streets until he came to a humble dwelling in a distant quarter. He found admission to the house, and a young girl, sweet Media Demetri, who was perhaps a year Ivan's junior, welcomed him, as did her crippled brother, Michael.

Media was an exile's daughter. Her father had been sent to the terrible prison-mines of Siberia because he spoke too openly of his love of liberty in a land where to utter such sentiments is a crime, and where every dorornick, or porter, is a spy, as is also every other moujik, or servant, one meets.

"What has happened, Media?" cried Ivan, the moment he saw the face of the young girl, which was pale and stained with tears.

"The most terrible blow has fallen."

"What! The edict of death has not been issued against your father?"

"It is so, Ivan."

"This is indeed terrible. To think that your brave father, who snatched me from the river when I was drowning during the days of the great flood, who saved my life at the risk of his own, must perish thus unjustly grieves me more than I can tell."

Months preceding the date of which we are writing Feodor Demetri, the father of Media and Michael, had been exiled to Siberia.

Very recently, however, Peter Dorkoff, the police spy, had produced evidence to show that Feodor Demetri, besides being a Nihilist, was especially concerned in a plot to assassinate the Czar.

It was because of this information that the sentence originally pronounced against the unfortunate man, which was a life-long exile to the prison-mines of Siberia, was changed to the death penalty.

But Feodor Demetri was already in the prison-mines of Timsk—entombed in a living grave, under one of the Baikal Mountains—more than two thousand versts from Petrograd.

"Yes," said Media. "The Czar has signed the order for my father's execution, and one of 'our brothers' has learned that a courier has been sent to carry the death-warrant to the mines."

"When did this courier leave Petrograd?" cried Ivan, his eyes suddenly lighting up.

"Yesterday at sunset, we think."

"And I leave to-night for Siberia. The courier who carries your father's death-warrant has only twenty-four hours the start of me!"

"What! you do not—"

"Hush! There is some one at the door."

There came a knock.

"Who is there?" demanded Media.

"Peter Dorkoff! Open in the name of the Czar!"

"The dreadful police spy!" whispered Media, trembling from head to foot.

CHAPTER II.

THE ORDER OF RUSSIAN LIBERTY.

"You must not be discovered here, Ivan. You know we are suspects and closely watched. If the spy of the police found you visiting an exile's house you, too, would become an object of suspicion," said Media, in a voice vibrating with solicitude for the boy courier's safety.

"Yes—yes," said Michael, opening a door. "Into yonder room and conceal yourself."

"Open, I say!" thundered the harsh voice of Dorkoff, and there came a shower of heavy blows upon the door which caused it to rattle on its hinges.

Ivan hesitated for an instant, but he recognized the wisdom of his friends' advice, and then he sprang through the open door.

Media quickly drew the bolt on the outer door, and Peter Dorkoff, the police spy, followed by three stalwart gendarmes, stalked into the cottage.

"What do you seek here?" demanded the cripple boy, bravely, placing himself before his sister, and meeting the advance of the emissaries of General Mellikoff.

"Not you or your pretty sister, my bantling. But you must know you are under suspicion since your father meant to murder the Czar. We keep a close watch on you, I can tell you. Where is the person who entered here a few moments since?"

"What person?" replied Michael, and he feigned surprise.

"Oh, you won't fool us, lad! Good Dova here saw him. He wore a long fur cloak—a kaftan. A young gallant coming to visit your pretty sister, it may be, but we must know the friends of the man's family who plotted high treason. Search the house, men."

"Stay!" cried Media. "I assure you there is no one here."

"We will not impugn your veracity, my pretty one, but at the same time we must satisfy ourselves," said Dorkoff, in a sneering way.

He pushed Michael aside as he attempted to bar his way, and, making the transit of the apartment, threw open the door which had but a moment before closed behind the retreating form of the boy courier.

Media sank into a chair, and a half-uttered exclamation escaped her lips.

"Hello! There is no one here! How is this? There is no way out of the room, either, that I can see," said Dorkoff, pausing upon the threshold.

Media and Michael started forward to the door of the interior apartment, and they could scarcely believe the evidence of their eyesight when they failed to discover Ivan in the apartment, whose only furniture consisted of a table and three chairs.

"The gendarme was mistaken. There are only two rooms in this hovel, and so it cannot be any one is concealed here," muttered Dorkoff.

Then to his men:

"Retire, and wait for me outside."

The gendarmes obeyed, but one of them said:

"I'd swear, your honor, I saw a young fellow go in here."

"You have taken an extra glass of vodka!" replied the police spy.

The liquor he mentioned is a kind of vitriolic white brandy, in great favor with the Russians.

The gendarme muttered a denial of the impeachment as the door closed behind him and his companions.

Then Peter Dorkoff turned to Media.

"A word to you in private, my little beauty," he said, while he gazed at the fair young girl in a way that made her tremble with apprehension.

"No, no; I do not wish any conversation with you," Media replied.

"You have no right to molest my sister. Go!" said Michael.

"Bah! You ill-made vermin, I'll—"

He made a threatening start at the brave crippled boy, but on the instant he recoiled again. The lad snatched up a stout, long-bladed and keen-pointed knife which lay upon a table at his side, where there were other tools with which he worked at carving wooden toys, which Media sold for him.

Michael brandished his knife.

"I am only a cripple, and you are a big, stout man; but there is strength enough in my arm to defend my sister!" he said.

"But what I have to say concerns your father, boy!" cried Peter Dorkoff.

"What of my father? Listen to him, Media, if he has aught to say of our poor father," said Michael, with eagerness.

"Speak!" cried Media.

With one stride the police spy crossed to her side, and bending his head, he whispered in the ear of the shrinking girl:

"Consent to the proposal I made you on the banks of the Neva months ago. Promise to become mine—my wife—and your father may yet be saved. There are ways in Russia to prove or disprove any charge, if one only knows how."

"Never! My father would not purchase his life at such a cost!"

"Think twice, girl. As an enemy I am to be dreaded."

"Go! Leave our house. I will never listen to you. You it was who brought the doom of death upon my innocent father."

"And he shall die—I swear it!"

"No—no! Heaven will not desert him. He shall live!"

"Bah! The order for his execution is already signed, and Gossi, the courier, is on the way to Siberia with it."

"Gossi!" repeated Media.

"Gossi!" echoed the crippled boy, and his eyes met those of his sister in an intelligent and meaning glance.

At that moment there came a shrill whistle from without.

It was a police call.

Peter Dorkoff sprang out of the house without uttering another word, and closed the door behind him with a spiteful bang.

"How could Ivan have escaped?" said Michael, as he closed and secured the door.

"I am sure I do not know how he got out of the house, unless—unless—oh, I think I have hit upon it, the chimney!" replied Media.

She ran into the next room, and went straight to a fireplace.

Michael put his crutch under his arm, and hobbled after her. He entered the adjoining apartment and saw Media kneeling on the stone hearth.

"It is just as I thought. Ivan has climbed up the chimney, and escaped over the low roof. See, there is soot here on the hearth which he must have detached in his ascent," she said.

"Ivan could easily have climbed up the narrow flue, for it is built of jagged stones which would give him a foothold. Ah, Dorkoff never thought of the chimney."

"And we almost forgot it ourselves. But Ivan may not have gotten off safely after all. The police whistle may have sounded to announce his capture."

"I don't think they have caught Ivan. He is such a splendid runner. But, Media, it is time for you to go to the meeting. The brothers of the order of Russian Freedom meet to-night to consider our father's fate, you know," added Michael.

Media waited for a few moments, and then, after glancing cautiously out of the window, she hurriedly attired herself for the street. She wore a gray pelisse that covered her graceful form and was secured at the waist by scarlet ribbons. This garment was fur-lined, and with it she could safely defy the cold of that winter's night.

When she looked through the window she had seen nothing of the police spy or the gendarmes who had accompanied him.

While Media attired herself for the street Michael kept watching at a window—peering cautiously out between the blinds—and when his sister was ready to go announced:

"I am sure there is no one lurking near."

Then he pressed his sister's hand, and she stole out of the

house, passed along an alley at its side, and presently emerged upon a street in its rear.

Media flitted along the deserted thoroughfare swiftly, casting apprehensive glances behind her, but she was not followed.

The devoted girl did not pause until she entered a narrow street close to the river, in the southern part of the city. Then she entered a basement under a chandler's shop, to which she was admitted after giving a signal. Along a narrow passage, and then up several stone steps, and Media found herself in a large room, where, perhaps, eighty men were assembled.

A murmur of welcome greeted Media's arrival, for the members of this particular chapter of "The Order of Russian Liberty" there assembled delighted to honor the daughter of their exiled chief.

A tall, bearded man was addressing the assemblage in low and earnest tones.

"Men of Russia," he said, "our chief, Feodor Demetri, is doomed to death, and the order of his execution has been sent to the prison-mines of Siberia, where he is buried. We are here assembled to devise means to save our noble and innocent leader. A daring scheme has been proposed, and one which may succeed, though there are a thousand chances against it. The scheme is one which I will not even trust myself to describe. It is known to most of you now, and thirty of our brave brothers have volunteered for the service. Even now they are at work, and at any moment we may receive the news of the success or failure of our great plot to save Feodor Demetri, the patriot."

After this the assembled members of the powerful secret order discussed various subjects relating to the business of the society, while they waited in suspense for the arrival of the messenger, who was to bring the tidings of the result of the most daring stratagem ever attempted in Russia.

Presently the door opened and Ivan, the boy courier, entered, accompanied by a corpulent, red-faced, good-natured-looking fellow, attired as a yemshick or driver. This man is especially used to designate post-boys also.

Ivan's companion was Yerki, his own chosen yemshick, who often accompanied him on his long, flying journeys as a courier in the service of the Czar, and Ivan as well as Yerki were members of "The Order of Russian Liberty." Both loved to think that a day might come when the principles of human liberty could be openly advocated in poor, down-trodden, oppressed Russia.

Media and Ivan retired apart from the others and conversed earnestly.

Media told what had transpired at the cottage after the disappearance of Ivan.

"And so the courier who carries your father's death-warrant is Gossi? Ah, I am much obliged to the villainous Dorkoff for that information," said Ivan.

"Of what are you thinking?" asked Media, clutching his arm, as startling thoughts flashed through her mind.

Ivan answered in a whisper.

A moment subsequently there was a commotion at the door, and a man pressed forward to the dais, or raised platform occupied by the chief.

He was panting and almost breathless, as though he had run long and swiftly.

He was the messenger who was to bring the announcement of the success or failure of the first great step in the daring plot to save Media's father.

"Your report!" cried the chief, and a breathless silence fell upon the assemblage while they waited for the messenger's answer.

CHAPTER III.

THE MESSENGER OF LIFE AND THE MESSENGER OF DEATH.

Meanwhile, perhaps an hour subsequent to the departure of Ivan, the boy courier, from the palace of justice, where he had received his orders for immediate departure for Siberia, General Mellikoff was seated alone in his private office within the great building.

Important matters relating to a petty insurrection among the Tartars of the far north engrossed his attention, and was the occasion of his remaining thus late at the department.

With contracted brows the chief of the dreaded "third section" read a telegraphic dispatch which he had recently received, and he muttered impatiently as he threw the paper from him:

"And so the telegraph wires have been blown down during the storm of this afternoon, and there is no communication to be had by means of them further than Langrod. This is un-

fortunate. It is impossible to send a dispatch to Siberia now, and so the telegrams which I have prepared must wait."

With this General Mellikoff arose, and touched a bell which was to call a guard from the passage without, for the officer had resolved to order his sleigh and seek his residence.

All the clerks of the department had long since quitted the great palace, and only the night guard, eight in number, who were stationed in various portions of the building, remained.

While Mellikoff was reading the dispatch which informed him of the destruction of the telegraph wires beyond Langrod a thrilling scene was in progress in the hall communicating with the main entrance. The chosen thirty of the order of Russian Liberty were at work, and the great plot for the salvation of Feodor Demetri was being carried into execution.

There were four guards in the main hall, but they were now as useless as men of wood. Drugged vodka, cunningly supplied them under the pretense of good-fellowship by a member of the order of Russian Liberty, had done its work. The guards slept soundly. When the last one had finally succumbed to the potent drug, a man disguised as a gendarme, who had been slyly watching them from behind a pillar of the passage, hastened to the entrance and gave a peculiar signal.

Then suddenly a party of thirty men, carrying carbines with bayonets fixed, filed into the passage, their muffled feet making scarcely a sound as they swiftly traversed the hall and entered the audience chamber.

Within the spacious apartment, which was festooned and hung with the arms and colors of Russia, the devoted thirty formed a half-circle from the side of the door leading to the passage which communicated with General Mellikoff's office around a draped table, upon which there was writing material.

"Now all is in readiness. Here is the order for the release of the chief of our chapter, Feodor Demetri. It needs but the signature of Mellikoff and his private seal. Once he has affixed those the document is perfect," said the leader of the party.

"Now, then, forward the four whom I named to seize Mellikoff," he added.

Four men instantly advanced from the ranks and strode toward the door. Through it they passed, and just as General Mellikoff was about to ring a second time for a guard they burst into his presence.

Four gleaming bayonets were presented at the chief's breast as he recoiled in consternation, stricken dumb with alarm.

"Utter a word, seek to give an alarm, and you are a dead man," hissed one of the intruders.

Quaking with terror, and obedient to the command of silence, Mellikoff was led into the great audience-room and to the table about which the daring thirty had ranged themselves.

The leader placed a pen in the general's hand.

"Sign your name to that document and affix your seal," he ordered.

Mellikoff hesitated.

"I protest against this outrage. I refuse," he said.

"Sign or die!" uttered the other, in a terrible voice.

Mellikoff glanced about upon the circle of stern, determined faces—all of which were more or less disguised—and he realized that he must submit to the inevitable.

In a moment, then, he seized the pen and signed his name, and also affixed his official seal to the "order of release."

This precious document was instantly folded by the chief of the party and placed in the hands of a young man, who concealed it upon his person and darted noiselessly out of the room.

Mellikoff was then bound and gagged and carried to the top of the building, where he was left in a small, unused apartment.

After this the "silent thirty" quitted the department of justice and dispersed in different directions.

The messenger who entered the secret meeting hall of the order of Russian Liberty, and who stood panting and breathless while the chief demanded his report, was he to whom had been intrusted the order for Feodor Demetri's release.

In answer to the chief, he cried in a moment:

"Success! Here is the order for the release of Feodor Demetri."

Media grasped Ivan's hand, as she said fervently:

"Heaven has heard my prayer!"

"And now that the order is in our hands it yet remains to convey it to the prison-mines—to Siberia. The most difficult part of the undertaking is yet to be accomplished. The order of release must reach the mines in advance of the arrival of the courier who carries our chief's death-warrant. Who will

brave the dangers of a winter journey to Siberia? Who will undertake to carry life to Feodor Demetri?" said the chief.

"I will!" shouted a ringing voice, and Ivan Lavaniski, the boy courier of Siberia, strode forward.

"The courier of the Czar—the courier of the Czar!" exclaimed many voices.

"Your offer is accepted, and in the name of right and justice I thank you. As a courier of the Czar you will have many advantages which another could not possess. The life of Feodor Demetri is in your hands, my brave boy," said the chief, and he gave Ivan the order of release which General Mellikoff had been compelled to sign.

When all save himself and Ivan and Media had withdrawn, the chief addressed the boy courier in a low, impressive voice, saying:

"Have you ever heard of the 'league of the Russian prison-mines?'"

"No."

"There is such a league in existence. Despite the vigilance of the mine guard it was formed long ago in the underground prisons of Siberia. Its object is to afford mutual protection to the unfortunates against the spies and informers who are introduced into every mine, and to organize revolts of the convicts. When a member is released from the mines or escapes he becomes what is called an 'outside worker for the league,' and is bound by oath to further the escape of his brethren, and also never to reveal their secrets save in case it is necessary to do so in order to insure an escape, and even then only near blood relations of a prisoner of the mines are to be trusted. Many 'good conduct men,' or convicts of the mines who are employed outside of the mines, as well as those who have been discharged or escaped, are to be found in Siberia.

"In case suspicion should fall upon you as the carrier of the order for Feodor Demetri's release, with the Nihilists who are everywhere to help you, and the chance of a friendly hand being extended for your assistance by the members of the 'league of the prison-mines,' there will still be hope for your success. I was a slave of the mines for ten years. When I escaped, as I finally did, I was dead to the world. Who or what I am no man may yet know; suffice it to say I have not heard my real name spoken in fifteen years, and no man in Russia outside of the prison-mines knows my secret," continued the chief.

Then the speaker placed a sealed package of considerable size in Ivan's hands, and whispered something in the lad's ear which even Media did not hear.

There was some further conversation, and then Ivan and Media took their departure. With him the boy courier carried the sealed package, which he handled very carefully.

"I have a dangerous and desperate man pitted against me. Gossi, the courier who carries your father's death-warrant, is a Cossack, and devoted to the Czar. He is a savage and powerful fellow, and cunning like all his race. I must get ahead of him. It is to be a race between him and me across Russia and Siberia. But if I cannot distance him I must at least overtake him, outwit him, and rob him of the order for your father's execution," said Ivan.

"But if you are suspected means will be taken to stop you on your way. Couriers will be sent in pursuit of you. The telegraph will be employed. Oh, Ivan, Ivan! You may be sacrificed without saving my father," said Media.

"We can only hope for the best. The right is on my side, and I feel nerved to meet any peril. But now every moment counts. Good-by, Media, and Heaven bless you."

There was one hurried embrace, a few murmured words, and then the boy courier tore himself away.

Half an hour later, accompanied by Yerki, his faithful yemshick, the boy courier was dashing away on the road to Siberia, seated in a posting sledge drawn by three of the fleetest horses in Russia.

The great and thrilling race between the messenger of life and the messenger of death was commenced.

At sunrise a small wayside village was reached, and here the first posting station on the route was situated.

Between this station and Petrograd the telegraph line was still intact, as indeed it was several relays beyond.

If suspicion had fallen upon Ivan, orders might already have been wired to stop him here, and it was with feelings of apprehension that Ivan approached the station.

As the sledge dashed forward nearer the station, Ivan's heart beat fast and his hands grasped a pair of revolvers concealed under his furs, for he discerned signs of unwonted excitement about the posting-house.

The succeeding moment a band of mounted Cossack patrolmen came riding forward at full speed, as though they meant

to intercept the boy courier and prevent his passing the station if he entertained such an intention.

"They must not stop us, Yerki. Be ready to lash the horses if they try it. My pistols are in my hands. Your carbine is at your feet. We are working to save a life, and must not hesitate when the trying moment comes!" cried Ivan.

Nearer and nearer the sledge of the boy courier and the band of Cossacks drew to each other. The latter suddenly spread themselves out across the road, and their leader dashed forward, shouting:

"Halt, in the name of the Czar!"

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT TRANSPIRED IN PETROGRAD AFTER IVAN'S DEPARTURE.

The purple glow which was the harbinger of approaching dawn was painting the eastern horizon, and the great city of Petrograd was awakening into life and activity after a night of silence and repose.

It was the morning succeeding the eventful night, filled with thrilling episodes, which witnessed the departure of Ivan, the boy courier of Siberia, upon his perilous mission as the carrier of the order for the release of Feodor Demetri, the prisoner of the mines.

But all was still silence, profound and unbroken, about the department of justice. The drugged guards, their senses yet enthralled by the potent drug which the friends of the doomed prisoner of the mines had administered, slept in the passages and upon the steps.

Several hours must elapse before the arrival of the officers and clerks of the department, for the business of the palace of justice never opened before ten o'clock, save on extraordinary occasions.

The desperate men who had accomplished the capture of Mellikoff had done their work effectually.

The rage, chagrin and humiliation of the chief of the secret police may be surmised. It was to him the most bitter of experiences. To think that he, the great Mellikoff, whose very name was supposed to be a terror to the Nihilists, should have been thus outwitted, and subjected to the indignities of coercion, amazed the fierce and arrogant Muscovite beyond measure.

But deliverance for Mellikoff is approaching.

The family of the official have become alarmed at his absence from his home without notice, and a mojick, or servant, of the general household has been sent to seek his master.

The sun has not yet appeared above the snow-clad horizon when the faithful servant arrives at the palace of justice.

Then there ensues the inevitable discovery which was only a matter of time, and the messenger from General Mellikoff's residence discovers the sleeping sentinels and guards.

The mojick is an intelligent man, superior to most of his class, the majority of which are stolid, stupid fellows, whose mental faculties have been blighted by generations of serfdom.

At once a suspicion that there is something seriously wrong at the palace dawns upon the mojick's mind as he beholds the sleepers, and he attempts to awaken them.

The guards are finally aroused, and the servant of General Mellikoff inquires for his master.

The guards are alarmed now; they know that they are liable to severe punishment for sleeping at their post, for nowhere is military discipline more rigid than in the empire of the Czar.

The mojick can only elicit the information that General Mellikoff is in his private office. But while he is engaged in questioning the guards, there is another arrival at the department of justice.

Peter Dorkoff, the secret emissary of the police, the dreaded spy, appears, and after listening for a moment to the conversation between the mojick and the guards, he rushes up to Mellikoff's private office and finds that apartment empty.

The spy is amazed, and he wanders from office to office seeking for Mellikoff, for the last words he had heard spoken by the guards as he brushed by them was an assertion that the general had not left the department.

Suddenly Peter Dorkoff halts abruptly in an upper passage. A sound has reached his hearing which startles and alarms him. He listens with almost breathless intentness, and there comes to his hearing a repetition of the alarming sound.

"A groan uttered by a human voice! Ha! I must investigate this!" exclaims Dorkoff.

Then he bounds up a short flight of stairs and reaches the

door of the closet in which the chief of the "third section" lies.

In a moment Mellikoff is released. His pride is a dominant passion, and as soon as he can speak, he says:

"Quick, Dorkoff, assist me down to my private office. This affair must be kept a profound secret from the people. Not a word outside of police circles, on your life."

"You can rely upon me, sire," responded Peter Dorkoff.

His curiosity was boundless, but he restrained the impulse to seek to satisfy it, and suppressed the questions which arose to his lips. The police spy knew better than to question his superior now. He waited for him to speak, and meanwhile assisted him down to his private office.

A moment later one of the guards who had been so recently aroused appeared at the door, shamefaced and trembling.

"Most highborn, your servant Timon awaits you in the ante-room," the gendarme announced.

"Bid him call my sleigh from the department stable and hasten thence to my residence," ordered Mellikoff.

"Aye, sire."

The guard gave a military salute and retired.

"Now, then, Dorkoff, you shall know what has occurred," said Mellikoff, and then briefly and concisely the officer related the startling and almost incredible incidents of the night.

"By my faith, sire, this is high treason, and every moment is now precious. The scoundrels have ere this sent a messenger on the way to Siberia with the order for the dangerous would-be assassin of the Czar—Feodor Demetri's—release. The courier of the Nihilists must be arrested," said Peter Dorkoff.

"Yes, it is no doubt the plot of the traitors to get the order for Demetri's release through to the mines of Timsk in advance of the decree of death with which Gossi, the courier, was dispatched."

"Your orders, sire?"

"Give the alarm to the police."

Peter Dorkoff saluted his superior, and then darted out of the room.

"Ha, this is an unexpected turn of affairs. I shudder to reflect upon the consequences to myself which the escape of Feodor Demetri might entail. He must not, shall not escape, or I am lost!"

Thus almost inaudibly muttered Dorkoff, as he swiftly made his way out of the palace of justice.

It was clear from the expression which he thus, probably unconsciously, gave to his thoughts that there must be some secret reason why the police spy feared the man whose death had been decreed through his instrumentality.

Dorkoff, inspired by a personal interest, accomplished his superior's will in a very brief space of time.

Within the ten minutes subsequent to his hurried departure from the department of justice, telegrams had been sent by his dictation to every station between the Russian capital and Langrod.

"Now, every officer at all the posting stations will be on the alert, and no traveler will be allowed to pass until he has been closely searched. We shall see if the Nihilist messenger can run the gauntlet of the Czar's watchdogs," said Peter Dorkoff with some complacency, when he had seen his telegram dispatched.

"If I could but obtain a clue to the identity of the messenger we wish to capture, or if I had but a description of the traitor, his apprehension would become a certainty. Is there no way to obtain such information?" thought the police spy.

He reflected for a moment and then suddenly exclaimed:

"I have the idea! Where were my wits that I did not think of it before? The necessity for his overtaking and passing the courier Gossi would surely be a sufficient incentive to the Nihilist messenger to start for Siberia at the earliest possible moment. So he surely set out last night. I will question all the patrolmen or sentinels on the roads leading to Siberia. I will obtain from them a description of every person who left Petrograd last night after the outrage at the palace of justice was perpetrated. In that way I will strike the trail of the Nihilist."

The police spy was delighted with his own astuteness and acumen.

He ordered a sleigh and a swift team, and a few moments subsequent to the sending of the last dispatch along the line of the route to Siberia, which Ivan, the boy courier of the Czar, had taken to carry his message of life to the prisoners of Siberia, Dorkoff was speeding away from the city.

The spy of the "third section" visited each of the highways leading to Petrograd whence a traveler might gain the Siberian route, and everywhere he questioned the gendarmes and gate-keepers.

The result was perplexing, and the information which the emissary of General Mellikoff received as the result of his diligent inquiries was that only two persons had left Petrograd by any route leading to Siberia that night.

All the guards and gate-keepers united in this statement, and they one and all declared that the two solitary persons who had taken the route to Siberia that night were Ivan, the boy courier, and his yemshick.

Peter Dorkoff started as he heard this, and his eyes flashed. Was suspicion now directed to Ivan?

CHAPTER V.

LOST IN A SIBERIAN SNOWSTORM.

When the band of Cossacks suddenly spread out across the highway between the sleigh of the boy courier of Siberia and the first posting-station beyond Petrograd toward which Yerki was urging his splendid team, we know that the brave and devoted boy who had been intrusted to carry the message of life to the poor, condemned slave of the prison-mines anticipated the greatest danger.

But when the leader of the Cossack band dashed forward in advance of his followers, shouting the command which no man in Russia dare disobey, "Halt, in the name of the Czar!" Ivan believed that he was lost in very deed.

And yet the boy's chivalrous heart was inspired to resist. He looked with interest at the Cossacks, whom it seemed he must now regard as his foes.

The sun of the new-born day shone upon their swarthy, bearded faces, on their tall caps, and the glittering points of their long lances.

The band was composed of real Don Cossacks, the most devoted of the Czar's soldiery.

Ivan mentally counted the Cossacks at that exciting moment, as he estimated what his chances of resistance and escape were.

He saw that the Cossack patrolmen were likely to prove dangerous and fearless fellows in a conflict, and even if he succeeded in dashing through their ranks, would not a pursuit result disastrously?

It occurred to the boy as he clutched his concealed pistols that the present was an emergency where cunning or stratagem might be far more serviceable than force or open resistance.

But the succeeding moment an occurrence transpired which was to Ivan and Yerki a most complete surprise.

Within a few feet of the heads of the bounding team attached to the boy courier's sleigh the Cossacks' leader so abruptly pulled up his horse as to cause his animal to rear almost erect, and then wheeling, he shouted to his men:

"Fall back out of the road! This is the boy courier of Siberia, the messenger of the Czar!"

The Cossacks wheeled aside, and Yerki cracked his whip. His animals swept past the Cossacks, and were presently dashing up to the buildings of the posting station at a gallop, while the officer of the Cossacks saluted Ivan politely as he passed.

Throughout Russia and Siberia no one has authority to detain a royal courier. He is recognized as one of the servants of the Czar. The arrest of a courier could only be accomplished by a special mandate from the Czar in which the courier was named and described.

The arrival of the courier of the Czar was an event at the posting station. The captain of the patrol, station hands, post-boys, hostlers and the like appeared as the sledge drew up at the station.

"Fresh horses! Look alive now, my good men! We are on important service, and a dozen copecks shall reward you if you hasten," cried Ivan, who never forgot that everything depended upon his overtaking Gossi, who carried the order for the execution of Feodor Demetri.

The boy courier was dashing away again on the road to the prison-mines a moment later. He began to breathe easier. Since the person who carried the order for the release of the exile was unknown, there was still hope for him.

The snow began to fall gently and steadily as Ivan and his faithful Yerki set out from the posting station, and as they proceeded the storm increased.

Night was approaching when they were traversing a black forest of pines, larch and fir trees. The Arctic wind was

piercing cold; every trace of the trail was buried out of sight under the snow, which filled the air and blinded the travelers.

For some time they had been gazing anxiously ahead, striving to discern the light of the next posting station, which they should have reached before darkness fell.

"Yerki, we surely should have reached the next posting station an hour ago," said Ivan.

"Yes, little father."

"It must be that we are lost."

"Lost!" exclaimed Yerki, and he added, "the snow has blinded me, and it may be that I have strayed from the right trail. This forest is full of paths. But, oh, let us hope we are not lost! Let us pray to all the saints to direct us aright."

The cold was so intense now that the horses were covered with ice.

To be lost on such a night of tempest and of storm in the bleak and desolate forest of the frozen prison-land was a horrible prospect to contemplate.

"There seems to be an opening in the forest not far in advance of us. Perhaps it is the end of the timber. The station we seek is near the borders of a wood. It may be we shall discover it when we are out of the growth," said Ivan, while to his mind came the terrible thought that if he was to perish there that awful Arctic night, Feodor Demetri would be executed, while the prowling wolf might rend and tear the message which was to bring him deliverance.

A few moments elapsed, during which the jaded horses, encouraged by the yemshick's voice and whip, floundered onward through the snow, and then they emerged upon the wind-swept steppes.

It was a desert of snow.

The darkness was complete; but no ray of light, no evidence of the proximity of the posting-station could be discovered.

Upon the steppes the wind blew a gale, Ivan felt himself almost lifted from his seat, and the air cut like a knife as it penetrated even his reindeer coat.

"Back! Yerki! Back into the shelter of the woods! It is our only hope!" cried Ivan, and the yemshick wheeled his team about, and after a struggle with the buffeting gale they gained the woods again, and halted panting and ready to fall.

At that moment Ivan heard an appalling sound.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LONE HUT IN THE SIBERIAN FOREST.

The sound which appalled the boy courier as his sleigh regained the shelter of the woods was the fierce roar of several Siberian bears, and the sound emanated from a point not far distant.

The horses uttered snorts of terror and threatened to break loose, while the roars of the bears came nearer.

The Siberian bear grows to enormous size, and when enraged or rendered savage by hunger, it will not hesitate to attack man, and on such occasions it becomes a fierce and formidable antagonist.

Yerki leaped from the sleigh carbine in hand; catching the horses by the bits, he tried to lead them forward.

In the darkness he stumbled against some object, and the next moment he uttered a shout of joy.

"What is it, Yerki?" cried Ivan, leaping out of the sledge.

"As I live, a hunter's hut half-buried in the snow, and I stumbled through the door."

"Then it may afford us a shelter?"

"Yes."

Yerki sprang back to the horses and began to detach the animals from the vehicle, while the roaring of the bears grew nearer, and also afar off was heard the long-drawn howl of a wolf.

Yerki led the horses into the hut in single file, and Ivan followed.

The boy courier deposited the contents of the sleigh, including the mysterious package which Mavernich, the chief of the Nihilists, had given him, upon the floor and Yerki secured the door by means of a heavy wooden bar which he found conveniently at hand.

"This is much better than breasting the snowstorm. Have you the lantern, little father?" the yemshick asked.

"Yes, and I am now trying to procure light, but my hands are so nearly frozen that I cannot hold a match. Ah, now I have it!"

The interior of the hut was illuminated, and the boy courier and his companion glanced about at their surroundings.

Then almost simultaneously a cry of horror and surprise burst from their lips, for the light had revealed something which startled them.

Upon the floor of the solitary hut of that desolate forest lay two human forms.

One was a man, the other a youth, and both were dead and frozen stiff.

The man and the boy were clothed in the garb of Siberian hunters, deer-skin coats, fur cloaks and caps, woollen leggings, and top-boots of their own make.

Upon a rudely constructed hearth the last blackened embers of a fire of pine-cones lay. The fire had long been extinct, and Yerki accounted for the death of the hunters, saying:

"Their fire went out while they slept and they were frozen."

Such was undoubtedly the fact, and similar instances of death from the cold occur in Siberia every winter.

"Poor fellows. There are anxious hearts at some hunter's home to-night, where loved ones are waiting for those who will never return," said Ivan solemnly.

"What's the trouble with the bears? They are going straight by the hut. Hear them roar. I should like to have a shot at them, but——"

Yerki paused suddenly as he heard the sound of a human voice.

"Ha, some persons are approaching. They must be in force else they would not have frightened the bears," continued Yerki.

They listened breathlessly, and soon they were able to hear the conversation of the approaching men, and this, too, while they were some distance away, for the rarified air driven by the gale which blew from the direction of the new-comers conveyed sounds distinctly an almost incredible distance.

The boy courier and his faithful driver listened intently, and presently they heard one of the approaching Cossacks say to a comrade:

"Yes, and the young rascal passed us at the first station as bold as you please."

"And you had no orders to stop him, then?"

"No. He had been gone some hours, when there came the telegraphic order from Petrograd to arrest Ivan, the boy courier of Siberia, on suspicion of being the carrier of the illegally obtained order for the release of an exile. The order of General Mellikoff further directed that, whether the illegal order was found on the boy or not, he be sent back to Petrograd."

"Ah, the general is cunning. He foresaw the boy might throw away the message if he had it?"

"No doubt; and the general most likely intends to make the boy tell all about the affair. I suspect the general believes he knows, or he would not order him sent back. There are torture-rooms in Petrograd where Ivan will be forced to speak."

"And I, Gavod, the special courier, am ordered to carry the message for the governor of Irkutsk onward when it is taken from Ivan?"

"Yes, we will overtake him before he reaches the next post-ing-station, since he has wandered out of his route in the storm."

"At all events the order for his arrest has been flashed along the wire all the way to Langrod, and he cannot long escape."

"Ah, the worst misfortune has befallen us. But heaven has not deserted the right. I believe Providence directed us here to this hut. Come, Yerki, there is but one hope for us now," said Ivan.

"I don't see a single chance, little father, if they discover the hut."

"I do, and I will tell you my plan."

The boy courier did so.

The yemshick gazed at his young master for a moment in astonishment, and then he exclaimed in genuine admiration:

"You are a wonderful boy."

After this some time elapsed, and finally the Cossacks arrived at the hut. They might have passed it, but several of the band carried lanterns borne upon the ends of their lances, and the hut was discovered.

by General Mellikoff, a suspicion was awakened in the spy's mind.

There were other circumstances which seemed to Dorkoff to corroborate his suspicions.

"After all it may be that the boy courier carries the order for Demetri's release. He was formerly very attentive to Media, the exile's daughter. Though he has avoided the home of the Demetris since the father was sent to the mines, knowing that all who visited his family would be placed under surveillance, the boy may still be the accepted suitor of the beautiful girl. Yes, I believe that beardless youth is my successful rival. Ah, who was the youth whom the gendarmes saw enter Demetri's house last night? I think now the soldier was not mistaken. Though he escaped in some mysterious way, the young man may have been Ivan."

Thus reflected the spy, and the more he considered the matter the more he was inclined to think he had hit upon the truth.

Filled with satisfaction at the prospect of causing trouble for Ivan, whom he secretly had long jealously hated, Peter Dorkoff returned to the city, and immediately sought an audience with General Mellikoff.

The officer received his subordinate as soon as he was announced, and the latter made haste to acquaint Mellikoff with the suspicions which he entertained regarding Ivan. He explained all the circumstances which seemed to invest his theory with probability.

Mellikoff was surprised and interested.

"What is more probable than that the lover of the exile's daughter should have undertaken to carry the order for his release? You have done well, Peter!" cried Mellikoff, when the spy had related all which he had come to tell.

"Then you agree with me, your excellency?"

"Yes. The very fact that Ivan is a courier would seem to insure his success. There is, of course, a possibility that we are doing him an injustice, and his past fidelity to the Czar is in his favor."

"But I have heard more than once that Ivan has been heard to express sentiments of a Nihilistic tendency."

"Say you so? The Nihilists are everywhere; among the common people, in the army, among the nobility, around the throne. They are undermining the very foundation of the Russian empire. It may be reasonable to suppose that even a trusted courier has joined their ranks."

"Yes, sire."

"But this question need not long be left in doubt. I represent his supreme majesty, the ruler of Russia, in my authority to make arrests. I will send a telegraphic order for the arrest of Ivan, the boy courier of Siberia."

Thus decided General Mellikoff.

Thus it came about that the order for the arrest of Ivan was sent.

Having explained the circumstances which directed suspicion to the boy, we will now return to the lonely forest hut where he and Yerki had sought shelter from the storm.

"Hello! Here is a dwelling!" cried one of the Cossack band, as the light at the end of his lance disclosed the hut partially concealed by the drifted snow.

The Cossacks deployed, and quickly invested the hunter's cabin. Meanwhile, one of their number, who had long been on duty at the last station, had ridden close to the sleigh which Ivan had deserted.

He recognized the vehicle as the sleigh in which Ivan had set out from the last station, and so informed his companions.

"Ah! We are sure of the young rascal. He has sought shelter within the hut. Come, Harka, we will enter," said the Cossack captain.

He and the man who had identified the sleigh used by the boy courier approached the door of the snow-bound hut, and the chief struck it several heavy blows with the butt of his lance.

"Open in the name of the Czar."

But in this case the door was not opened, and there was no response. Silence reigned within the hut.

"We must force the door, Harka. Brink your forage axe," ordered the Cossack chief.

The man addressed hastened to his horse to get the axe, which was strapped to his saddle, and listening at the door of the hut, his superior heard the snorting of a horse and the sounds made by Ivan's team in moving about within.

A shower of blows were rained upon the door with the axe, and it presently fell inward with a crash.

The two Cossacks entered, thrusting forward their lances, upon which the lanterns hung.

CHAPTER VII.

IVAN AND YERKI DECEIVE THE COSSACKS.

When Peter Dorkoff obtained the information that the boy courier of Siberia and his yemshick were the only persons who had left Petrograd on the night of the affair at the department of justice, despite the position of trust which Ivan occupied, and notwithstanding the confidence reposed in him

The light dispelled the darkness of the interior of the hut, and revealed to the Cossacks two horses and two human forms stretched out upon the floor before the rude hearth, in which the fire had long since expired.

"What's this? Can it be they sleep?" cried the Cossack chief, gazing at the motionless forms.

He approached and placed his hands upon the two motionless forms.

"Frozen!" ejaculated the chief of the Cossacks.

"Yes," replied Harka.

"Then they are dead, of course; and see, the rodents—the great wood-rats—have been at work," he added, as he turned the bodies so their faces could be seen.

"They must have been dead for some time, and the rodents have made quick work. They are surely Ivan and Yerki, his yemshick," said the Cossack chief.

"Not a doubt of it, sire. I recognized their attire, and then the horses, and the posting sleigh. Though their faces have been disfigured so we cannot identify them, there is no question as to who they are."

"No, and yet that the rats should have done their work so quickly is surprising."

With this remark the Cossack leader knelt beside the boy's body and quickly searched his garments.

"Here is a legal-looking paper, and here is another. Hold your lantern nearer, Harka. There, that's right," said the chief, and presently he read two documents which he had found in the pockets of the dead youth.

The first was a passport made out to Ivan Lavaniski; the second paper was a dispatch addressed to the Governor of Irkutsk.

"Well, there is no longer a doubt, Ivan and Yerki have perished, and now let me make the closest possible search for the order for the release of the exile," said the Cossack, when he had examined the two papers which he had discovered.

Assisted by his subordinate, he then subjected the two bodies to the most careful search possible, and they also examined the hut, seeking for a hiding-place in which the order which they had anticipated finding might have been placed.

Their careful search was not rewarded by a discovery, and at length they were satisfied that the suspicion entertained against Ivan had wronged him.

"Poor fellow," said the Cossack leader, "he was innocent after all."

The other assented.

Then the band without was informed of the discovery made by their leader, and by his orders Ivan's team was attached to the sleigh again. The two bodies found in the hut were placed in it, and while one of the Cossacks assumed the part of a yemshick and drove the sleigh, the party set out for the posting station toward which the boy courier had been traveling.

CHAPTER VIII.

TRAILED BY WOLVES.

A stratagem suggested by Ivan had proved successful, and the Cossacks were completely deceived, as we have seen.

When Ivan told the devoted Yerki of the plan which had occurred to him whereby they might escape discovery, he said:

"The dead hunter is a man of very nearly your build, and the boy is almost exactly my size. We must exchange garments with them. Let the Cossacks think we have perished, and there will be no pursuit of us further."

The plan of the boy courier was quickly carried into execution.

The boy courier and the yemshick exchanged garments with the dead hunters, and Ivan placed his passport and the dispatch for the Governor of Irkutsk where it had been found.

Then, leaving their own weapons beside the dead hunters and taking those of the unfortunate victims of winter with them, they hastily quitted the hut.

The brave boy courier and Yerki upon leaving the hut breasted the storm on foot, and made all possible haste to place some distance between themselves and the hut.

Ivan had not forgotten to bring the mysterious package from the hut which had been given him by the chief of the Nihilists in Petrograd.

The youth now carried the package in question in a hunter's game-bag slung on his back, in the manner which he had found it on the person of its owner.

Ivan was elated.

"Yerki, we are in luck after all," said Ivan.

"Yes, little father—that is to say, if the prospect of freezing

to death in this dark forest is luck," answered Yerki, grumbly.

"We must not think of perishing now,"

"Listen, little father. What was that?"

"Some one calling."

"Are you sure? I thought it was the cry of a wolf."

"Mercy, Yerki! If the wolves should scent us and start to trail us, there is no escape. Those fierce animals are maddened by famine in the winter."

"Yes. Better have surrendered to the Cossacks."

"No, I'll carry the message to the prison-mines or perish."

"You are brave and daring, little father. But there it is again. That sound is surely the howl of a wolf."

"Come, let us press onward. We may discover the route to the station. To delay now is death. There is another howl, and another and another. They come from different directions, and the wolves are gathering."

The prospect for the boy courier and his companion was appalling.

Nearer and yet nearer approached the wolves, and soon the defiles of the forest rang with their fierce, discordant howls.

The boy courier and Yerki examined the heavy carbines which they had taken from the dead hunters.

The stars were now discernible in the sky, and there was sufficient light to enable Ivan and Yerki to see any dark objects, such as the wolves, at some little distance.

"We shall have to make a fight. Let us entrench ourselves beyond one of the snowdrifts," said Ivan.

They darted forward side by side, and they had barely ensconced themselves behind the first snowdrift when a huge, gaunt wolf, the vanguard of the famishing legion, sprang into view, exposing eyes like coals of fire.

"Fire!" shouted Ivan, as the first wolf came within range.

Yerki discharged his weapon, and the foremost wolf fell. The others halted just long enough to rend and devour the dead animal, and then they came on again.

Ivan then discharged his carbine, and another wolf fell. The pack, as before, halted momentarily to devour it.

"Come, we must run for the trees! We were wrong to venture into the interglade, but I did not think the wolves would overtake us before we crossed it," cried Yerki, who had now reloaded his carbine.

In a moment the howling pack would surround the fugitives. Yet the one slender chance remained to them of gaining the timber again and climbing into the tree-tops beyond the reach of the howling pack.

As Yerki spoke he darted for the trees.

Ivan followed.

It was a thrilling race, but the boy courier and his companion were not fated to perish there.

They gained the timber in advance of the wolves, and swung themselves into the branches of a tree before they were overtaken.

But scarcely had the escaping ones gained the limbs beyond the reach of the wolves when the detonation of a volley of shots rang out near at hand, and a party of six men emerged out of the woods.

The wolves were halted by this fusillade, and every shot told. A second and a third volley was discharged, and the ravenous pack was routed.

But Ivan and Yerki were in dread of the men almost as much as of the wolves. They had not been able to disguise themselves facially. There was danger that they might be recognized, for both had traveled the road to Siberia many times, and their faces were well known to the people of the various posting stations.

One glance at the men who had so unexpectedly appeared upon the scene assured the fugitives that they were not Cossacks, and this discovery slightly encouraged them.

They had already been discovered.

The men who had dispersed the wolves came straight toward them.

The boy courier and his companion saw, as the men drew nearer, that they were a party of hunters who had probably been belated in the forest by the storm.

"We came just in time, good friends. The wolves would have kept you treed until you were frozen and dropped down within their reach," said one of the men, when he reached the tree occupied by our two friends.

The speaker, who seemed to be the leader of the party, was an old gray-headed man, while, as the keen-sighted Ivan did not fail to observe, his five companions were young and stalwart.

There was no help for it, and so Ivan and Yerki descended

from their elevated perch, the former remarking in reply to the old hunter:

"Shasha—who are you—that we may know whom to thank?"

"I am Isaac, the feldsheer of Orloff, and these are my five sons. We were overtaken by the storm while hunting," replied the old feldsheer, or post-surgeon.

Then Ivan recognized him.

Orloff was the name of the station for which the boy courier was bound when he lost his way. He had often met old Isaac, the feldsheer, at the station when making his journeys in the service of the Czar, and he knew that he would be recognized now.

But the recognition could not be evaded.

Ivan gained the ground, and the old post-surgeon looked into his face.

"Ivan, the boy courier of Siberia!" exclaimed the old man.

"Ah, father, we have made a lucky find. You remember the dispatch ordering his arrest," said one of the young men excitedly.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SIGNAL OF THE LEAGUE OF THE PRISON-MINES.

The dispatch ordering the arrest of the boy courier had been received at Orloff earlier in the day, and previous to the departure of the feldsheer and his sons from the posting-station upon their hunting expedition.

The old official and his companions were informed of the suspicion which had fallen upon the boy.

As the young man seized Ivan, the latter drew away rapidly, and his hand fell upon the handle of the long, keen-bladed hunting-knife in his belt.

For one thrilling moment an encounter which could have resulted in naught but disaster for Ivan and Yerki seemed inevitable.

But before the further hostilities ensued Ivan caught the eye of the old post-surgeon, and quick as thought gave him the signal of the league of the prison-mines.

A startled and incredulous expression appeared upon the features of the old feldsheer, but it was supplemented by a look of quick intelligence, and to Ivan's unutterable satisfaction he made the proper response to his signal.

The boy courier felt that he was saved.

The old surgeon of Orloff addressed some remarks to his sons in an undertone, and they drew away from Ivan and Yerki.

Then the old man and the boy courier shook hands while Yerki regarded the sudden and favorable turn of affairs in open-mouthed wonderment.

"It is all right, Yerki. We are among friends after all," said Ivan, gladly, and his comrade was reassured, though he did not yet comprehend it all.

Then the old post-surgeon and Ivan conversed apart, and Ivan confided his secret mission to the former.

"Feodor Demetri!" exclaimed the old man, when he heard the name of the prisoner of the mines whom he meant to save.

"Do you know him?" asked Ivan, quickly.

"Know him! Aye, we were old friends years ago, before I was banished to Siberia through the machination of political enemies, though I never was a Nihilist."

"And you will help me?"

"Yes, I am bound to do so."

"And your sons?"

"They will obey me unquestioningly. They have no love for the tyrant who banished their sire."

"Then all is not lost. Every moment of delay decreases my chances of overtaking Gossi. I must have a conveyance."

"You shall. My son Carl owns a sleigh and a team."

"Good. This is better fortune than I dared to hope for. The darkest hour is just before the dawn. But of all things it is most important that I should recover my passport."

"You shall go to my son Carl's house on the outskirts of the village, while I proceed to the relay house and ascertain if the Cossacks who have your passport are there."

The party started forward.

As they traversed the woods Ivan explained the mystery of the sudden friendship of the party to Yerki.

The house of Carl, the feldsheer's son, was reached without encountering a single person, thanks to the storm which kept the inhabitants of the straggling roadside village of Orloff within doors.

The fugitives were supplied with refreshments, of which they stood in great need, and scarcely had they "broken

bread" with their host when the aged feldsheer returned from the posting-station, to which he had at once betaken himself as soon as the village was reached.

"The Cossacks are there. They arrived at the station with the dead bodies supposed to be the remains of yourself and Yerki something more than an hour ago," announced the old surgeon as soon as he entered the presence of the boy courier.

Ivan sprang up from the table at which he was seated and exclaimed, in a determined voice:

"I must make the attempt to get back my passport! Without it, when beyond Langrod, where nothing is known of my affairs, I cannot post forward. To attempt to reach Timsk and the mines without a passport would be folly."

"True; you would be arrested on suspicion."

"I am familiar with the interior of the relay house and all the buildings of the posting-station. You must learn where the chief of the Cossacks sleeps and I will take my passport from him while he sleeps."

"It is a terrible risk."

"It will not be discovered. If the Cossack attempts to sound an alarm it will be my life or his," said Ivan, in a voice of intense and thrilling sternness.

Some further conversation ensued, and then Ivan, Yerki and the old feldsheer stole away to the posting-station.

The boy courier and his yemshick concealed themselves in the stable and their secret friend entered the posting-station. Soon the feldsheer returned to them, and he said:

"The Cossacks are about retiring and the station will soon be closed for the night. The chief of the party who has your passport, Ivan, has been assigned to a room on the ground floor in the rear of the hostelry."

"Good; and there is a window?"

"Yes, you can see it from here," replied the old man, and he pointed through the open door.

"I shall enter through that window," replied Ivan.

The boy courier waited until every light in the posting-station had been extinguished, and then crept out of the stable and stealthily made his way to the window which he meant to enter.

Under the window Ivan listened for a moment, and as all was silent he presently tried the sash.

It yielded, for they do not guard against burglars in the Russian hamlets, where no stranger ever stops unless his character is vouched for by his passport.

Without a sound Ivan pushed up the sash and crept through the window, which was very narrow.

The venturesome boy saw the Cossack chief sleeping upon a couch in the further end of the apartment.

The Cossack's coat hung upon the back of a chair.

He stole across the room and approached the chair upon which hung the garments of the sleeping Cossack.

At the same time a dog in the house set up a fierce barking, and the savage bay of the animal informed Ivan that the brute was one of the most dangerous of the canine race—a Siberian bloodhound.

A moment later the boy courier found his passport in the inside pocket of the Cossack's coat, and concealed it in his bosom.

He turned, and was about to glide to the window, when, aroused by the barking of the dog, the Cossack chief started up in his couch.

Then he saw Ivan, and with a shout of alarm, he sprang from the couch and rushed toward the boy courier.

CHAPTER X.

THE BOY COURIER AGAIN ON THE ROAD.

Ivan reached the window through which he had made his entrance just as the Cossack leaped out of bed.

The window was still open, and before the Cossack had taken a single forward step the boy courier sprang through it and darted away, keeping close to the outbuildings of the station, where the shadows fell dense and black, thus concealing himself.

Yerki and the old feldsheer, whose fealty to the secret order of the prison-mines had made him Ivan's friend, witnessed the latter's flight, and they crept away by a different route from that taken by the boy.

Meanwhile the Cossack officer was hastily putting on his garments, and while he was thus engaged there came a rap at the door and a porter entered holding a large and savage bloodhound by the collar.

"What has disturbed your excellency? I heard you shout. The barking of the dog had awakened me," said the mojick.

"Zounds! What sort of a town have you here? Some one entered my room through the window. See, it is open yet!" cried the Cossack chief.

The mojick carried an oil lamp, and a gust of wind, carrying with it a cloud of light snow, almost extinguished the light as the Cossack spoke.

"A thief at Orloff! I should say that was impossible, sir. Every one is honest here. The 'wanderers' always pay their dues, and we have no 'outcasts,'" replied the servant.

"I do not say he was a thief, for nothing has been stolen from me. I cannot account for the fellow's coming. It was not for any good purpose, I'll wager," said the Cossack.

With solicitude for the safety of the dispatch and passport which he had taken from the body which he supposed to be the remains of the boy courier, the officer had hastened to examine his pockets, and he missed nothing.

Meanwhile Ivan had made rapid progress toward the domicile of Carl, the feldsheer's son, toward which suburban dwelling old Isaac and Yerki, the yemschick, were also hastening.

But he heard a hound behind him, and the animal's flying leaps carried him forward at a rate of speed almost incredible. Ivan soon saw that he was to be overtaken.

Suddenly halting, he wrapped his heavy cloak about his left arm, and then crouched down in the snow upon one knee, with his naked hunting-knife poised in his right hand for a terrible thrust.

In a moment the great hound was upon him, and made a terrific leap at his throat. But Ivan threw his cloak-bound arm up to a guard, and the hound buried his sharp fangs in the folds of the garment without penetrating to the lad's flesh. At the same moment, while the hound clung to his arm with a tenacious hold, Ivan dealt him several powerful blows with his knife in rapid succession.

The last stroke was a death-blow. The boy's knife penetrated a vital part, and the hound fell floundering in the snow, gnashing his cruel fangs in mad rage, and uttering fierce howls of pain.

Ivan bounded forward, and reached the dwelling of his new-found friend, the feldsheer's son.

Yerki and old Isaac had preceded the boy courier there, and a serviceable-looking sledge drawn by three stout little Russian roadsters, stood at the door, ready to carry the noble youth onward upon his mission of life and justice.

"Victory!" cried Ivan gladly, and he held up the recovered passport. "And now forward once more upon the trail of Gossi over the route to the prison-mines."

He leaped into the sledge and Yerki sprang to the driver's seat.

"But stay," added Ivan. "One thought troubles me. The report of my death will be carried to Petrograd. Even now the news may have reached the capital. I have loved ones there whose hearts will be broken if they think me dead—my mother, whose only stay and support I am, and another who is very dear to me."

The boy courier was thinking of Media, the exile's daughter.

"And our friends, believing Feodor Demetri lost, will perhaps bring upon themselves some serious calamity by attempting some act of vengeance," he continued.

"If we could only manage to let our friends in Petrograd know the truth!" said Yerki.

"Alas, it is impossible!" replied Ivan.

"No, perhaps not," said old Isaac.

"What! You do not mean there is a way to secretly communicate with our friends?" cried Ivan.

"Yes."

"How?"

"By means of my trained carrier pigeons—real Antwerp birds."

"Heaven is with us. I'll write a note. But stay. Where will the carriers alight?"

"At my brother's house in Petrograd. I have four of his pigeons here. When released they will fly straight to their home cote. My brother and I carry on a secret correspondence in that way. The Czar's watch-dogs guard the earth, but the carriers soar above it beyond their reach."

"Excellent! Give me pencil and paper, and I will write my message. But again I am forgetting myself. Can your brother be trusted?"

"His name is Barva—Leo Barva."

"Leo Barva! A member of our chapter of the order of liberty! I know him well. He is my friend and Media's."

"I thought you would be satisfied when you heard his name. Here is writing material."

Pencil and paper were placed in Ivan's hands, and he dashed off a note as follows:

"Orloff, on the Route to Siberia.

"DEAR MEDIA: Do not credit the report of my own and Yerki's death. We made the Cossacks think we had perished, but it was only a ruse to save ourselves. We are safe and posting onward to carry the order of release to your father. Tell this news to my mother and the chief of the Nihilists.

"Your devoted
IVAN."

"A dangerous document, if it should by any evil chance fall into the hands of your enemies, young man."

"I must take the risk."

"Very well. I will promise you that my feathered messenger shall begin its flight with your note within an hour."

"Good. And now, Carl, here is the price of your outfit," said Ivan, and he placed several gold coin in the hands of the feldsheer's son.

Scarcely five minutes had been consumed at Carl's house after Ivan returned with his recovered passport, and then he said farewell to the old feldsheer and his sons, and the sledge dashed away.

Meanwhile, old Isaac hastened to make good his promise to the youth, and not many versts had been traversed by the young courier when an Antwerp pigeon was released by the old feldsheer, and under its wing was secured the note which Ivan had written to Media.

Night was falling as the boy courier was proceeding slowly when he heard the sound of bells behind him, and a moment later he was overtaken by the courier from Orloff.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BOY COURIER IS DENOUNCED.

When the sound of the bells warned Ivan and Yerki that a traveler was behind them, the yemschick strove to urge his team to increased speed, but the horses were unable to respond.

"Ten to one it is Yavod, the courier, with my dispatch," said Ivan.

"So I think, little father," assented Yerki, and in a moment or so the posting sleigh reached them.

They had turned out to permit it to pass, and it dashed by without stopping. The yemschick shouted:

"How are you, brother?" to Yerki, and the latter responded in the same words.

There was only one man besides the driver in the posting sleigh, and that personage Ivan recognized at a glance. He was Yavod, the courier who had been ordered to supersede the boy.

The posting sleigh was soon out of sight.

Ivan and Yerki congratulated themselves that the danger was passed, but they at once recognized the necessity of passing Yavod, and they knew they must keep ahead of him.

The night was soon upon them, and as the jaded horses pressed slowly forward they discerned in the distance the lights of a solitary dwelling of considerable size.

"The palace of Count Ammernoff!" exclaimed Yerki, whose familiarity with the route enabled him to recognize all the landmarks.

The boy courier's sleigh was driven into the court-yard, and a number of servants came forth as the jingling bells announced an arrival.

The overseer, or head man of the household, a sturdy Russian, with a red face and a not particularly intelligent expression, came forward and greeted Ivan, and he said:

"Welcome in the name of my master, the count, to all good subjects of the Czar."

Ivan responded appropriately, and he added:

"Is his highness the count at home?"

"No, sire, my master is at the court of Petrograd."

"Ah, I am sorry for that. But no doubt you can serve us."

"In what way? But your horses need rest. Before we talk they must be put up. You will accept the hospitality of the castle to-night?"

"Thanks. We will accept your hospitality. In you, my friend, the count has a representative to be proud of. Such bailiffs are rare. I shall not fail to commend you when I meet your master in Petrograd."

After they had partaken of a splendid meal, Yerki came to his young master and said in a low tone:

"Yavod, the courier, is here!"

Ivan started so violently as he heard this alarming news that he almost dropped a glass of wine which he was at that moment raising to his lips.

"Yes. In the stable I met his yemschick, and he recognized me. Yavod's horses are there. He sought shelter here for the night, instead of pressing on to the next posting station," continued Yerki.

"And where is Yavod's driver now?"

"The moment he saw me he fled from the stable. The superstitious fellow, who has heard of my death, took me for a ghost, but he will hasten to tell his master, and Yavod will surely identify us."

"Yes. We must be gone at once," answered Ivan.

He sprang up from his seat at the table.

Just as he did so the door of the dining-hall opened, and Yavod, the courier, stalked into the apartment, followed by the chief of the count's household.

At the sight of Ivan, Yavod, who knew him well, uttered an exclamation of surprise, and then he cried:

"My yemschick was right. This is Ivan Lavaniski, the boy courier of Siberia, alive!"

Instantly Ivan resolved to continue his deception. He saw that therein was his only chance of extricating himself from the dilemma.

"Who is that fellow? Why is he permitted to intrude here?" said Ivan to the chief of the household servants, pointing at Yavod and assuming an impatient tone.

"Fellow, indeed!" cried Yavod, growing red in the face and swelling with rage. "I tell you, my good fellow, as a servant of Count Ammernoff it is your duty to hold that fellow a prisoner. He is an impostor. He is Ivan, the boy courier of Siberia, and no more a count than I am."

"The fellow is drunk or mad; send him away," said Ivan.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DUEL AT COUNT AMMERNOFF'S PALACE.

As Ivan spoke he drew off his heavy glove, and, striding forward, he with it dealt Yavod a stinging blow in the face.

"Coward! If you seek fight, there is my defiance!" hissed Ivan.

The fierce Muscovite uttered a snarl of rage.

"I will kill you!" he cried, and in the same breath he added:

"I dare you to fight me with swords, Ivan Lavaniski!"

"It is beneath the dignity of a count of the Russian empire to fight a duel with one of the common people, but as I believe you are the representative of a member of the nobility who is my social equal, I will fight you."

"Where and when?"

"Here and now."

"Your excellency, I protest, I beg of you do not meet this man with the sword. I am convinced. I do not doubt your identity. I will have the scoundrel driven from the castle," said the chief of the household, who was completely deceived by Ivan's superb acting.

"The swords, I say, sirrah!" cried Ivan, stamping his foot in mock rage.

"Yes, bring them. I mean to slay the traitor if I cannot arrest him," said Yavod.

"If I must, I must, but remember, your excellency, if any harm comes to you, I act under protest," said the chief of the household.

"Hasten, and no more words. I hold you entirely blameless, and so shall your master, no matter what occurs."

The honest chief of the count's household hurried out of the room.

Just as he retired from the dining-hall, Yerki, whose good-natured face was now the very picture of consternation, whispered to Ivan:

"You must not fight him, little father."

"And why not?"

"Why, you must know Yavod is one of the most skilful swordsmen in all Russia."

"So I have heard."

"It is true. His father was a fencing-master who had no superior, and he taught all the great nobles in Petrograd."

"Well, I know something about the use of the sword, thanks to the instructions of Father Bethalda, my old tutor."

Yerki was about to reply, when one of the servants of the castle entered.

The man seemed very much excited, and the boy courier's heart beat fast as he wondered what was coming next.

The servant approached Yavod and, saluting him respectfully, he said:

"Sire, your driver has met with a misfortune."

"How so?"

"He received a kick in the head at the stable. He ventured too near the heels of a vicious horse."

"Is he seriously hurt?"

"He is insensible, and the house doctor says he fears his skull is broken."

Yavod uttered an enraged cry.

"All things work against me, but I'll have my revenge on the impostor. His heart's blood shall pay for the blow he dealt me," he gritted.

"The yemschick will not trouble us," whispered Ivan.

"I am glad of it, but sorry he is hurt. He was a good fellow, and I had nothing against him," replied Yerki.

Fortune could not have decreed any event more favorable to the plans of the boy courier just then than the accident which had befallen the poor yemschick.

By a mere chance the difficulty which might have overthrown all the brave lad's projects was removed.

The truth was that when Yavod's yemschick discovered Yerki in the stable he had hastened to inform his master, who had at once questioned Count Ammernoff's servants, and elicited the information that Yerki had arrived with the young Count Caska.

There was, of course, something more than a suspicion in the mind of the cunning and naturally suspicious Muscovite, and from the chief of the count's household retinue he obtained a description of the strange guest who called himself Count Caska.

This description was that of the boy courier Ivan, and suspecting how the boy had tricked him, he ordered his yemschick to mount a horse and ride on to the next posting station, give the alarm and telegraph the news of the discovery back to St. Petersburg.

The driver, full of the importance of his commission, hastened to the stable to procure a horse as soon as he received his master's order.

Then it was that he met with the accident which, though perhaps fatal to him, might result in the salvation of Ivan and Yerki.

Ivan had no suspicion of the fact that the news of his discovery had very nearly been transmitted to the next posting station while he lingered at the palace of Count Ammernoff.

The chief of the household was absent from the dining-hall for some time, and when he returned he brought with him a handsome case which contained a pair of Damascus dueling swords.

"Choose your weapon!" cried Ivan.

Yavod examined the two swords, and then he selected one of them and bent it almost double to test its temper. The wonderful blade stood this trial, and Yavod exclaimed:

"This sword suits me. Zounds, it is a beauty!"

The duelists threw aside their coats, and Ivan took the remaining sword from the case, tightened his belt about his waist and placed himself in position for the impending battle.

Yavod did the same.

The count's servant gave the word to commence the fight.

The duelists faced each other, and their swords met with a crash as both brought their weapons to "a guard."

At once Yavod assumed the aggressive. He commenced the battle with a savage and impetuous attack, as though he sought to sweep down his boy adversary by the mere force of strength.

Clash! clash! clash!

Thus sounded the ring of steel, and sparks of fire were stricken from the tempered blades.

But Ivan met the terrible onslaught of Yavod with a skill and deftness which astonished his confident antagonist.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VICTORY FOR IVAN.

Ivan was fully Yavod's equal as a swordsman, and perhaps he was his superior in some respects, but the lad recognized the fact that his adversary's superior strength would enable him to fight longer than he could.

Suddenly Yavod made a rapid feint at Ivan's breast, and then changing the direction of his thrust with the rapidity of lightning, he lunged at Ivan's sword-arm.

This double-sword play was skilfully made. Ivan's guard was not changed rapidly enough, and the point of Yavod's weapon penetrated his arm above the wrist.

Yerki uttered an alarmed cry.

The chief of the household and the waiters present made a forward movement.

But the succeeding instant Yavod uttered a cry of pain and

reeled backward. Ivan's sword had penetrated his shoulder, and his sword arm was rendered powerless. The weapon dropped from his nerveless grasp, and he fell upon the floor.

At the moment when Yavod's weapon penetrated Ivan's arm his guard was down, and heedless of the pain of his own wound the boy courier made a terrific forward lunge.

As Yavod fell, Yerki sprang to Ivan's side, while others attended to the boy's vanquished antagonist.

"Are you much hurt?" asked Yerki, as he assisted Ivan to bare his wounded arm.

"No, I think not. It is merely a scratch. He only touched me," replied the youth.

Meanwhile, the castle surgeon was called to attend Yavod, and in a moment or so the court physicians entered the room, and after examining the wound in Yavod's shoulder, he said gravely:

"This is a serious hurt. There is danger of a fever setting in. You must be put to bed at once and submit implicitly to my treatment, if you would avoid the most serious consequences."

Meanwhile, Ivan and Yerki lost no time in getting away from the castle.

The yemschick had selected an excellent team, and they were soon speeding away behind it. Before their departure, however, Ivan distributed a handful of gold coins among Count Ammernoff's servants, and they none of them doubted that such a gallant and generous youth was anything less than a count.

After this the boy courier made the journey to Langrod, beyond which station the telegraph wires were out of repair when he set out from Petrograd.

After passing Langrod, Ivan determined to make sure that there was no telegraphic communication between that station and the next, in order to guard against any possibility of disaster through the instrumentality of a telegram.

At the first station beyond Langrod the boy courier's sledge was driven boldly to the posting-house, and he demanded a change of horses in his real character.

He was recognized and welcomed, and no one interfered with him.

The journey to the Ural Mountains was accomplished, and Ivan and Yerki began the passage of the great range which divides Europe from Asia.

The Ural Mountains are not of wonderful height, but they are rugged, and dangerous to traverse, abounding as they do in yawning chasms, steep ascents and gloomy defiles.

As the last station on the European side of the mountain was passed the boy courier and his yemschick were very much elated, for they had received the information that Gossi was only four hours ahead of them.

The sledge of the boy courier was traversing a dark defile in the mountains. Above the trail, pendent from the crags, hung mighty icicles that glittered like diamonds in the light of the moon, and heaped upon the irregular sides of the narrow pass still further up were immense quantities of snow.

Our friends, as usual, were traveling by night, and Yerki nodded on the driver's perch, and Ivan was not more than half awake.

Suddenly the team stopped.

The yemschick and Ivan were wide awake again upon the instant, and in advance of them they beheld a vast mass of snow which had slid down from the mountainside and completely blocked the trail.

Here was an unexpected obstacle to their advance.

"What is to be done, little father?" asked Yerki, ruefully.

"We must pass the snowfall in some way. Remember, Gossi is only four hours ahead of us."

"Aye, you say we must pass the slide of snow. But how can we do that?"

"If need be we will abandon the sledge and ride the horses. Let us see if we cannot find a route by which we may lead the horses around the snowfall. You take one side of the defile and I will take the other," said Ivan.

With this the boy courier sprang from the sleigh and began to pick his way forward along the steep bank on one side of the trail above the snowfall, while Yerki directed his steps along the opposite side.

They were soon out of sight of each other, but Ivan had not gone far when he paused for a moment, held by the rare loveliness of the scene around him.

But suddenly Ivan heard a shout of terror uttered by Yerki. There was no mistaking the intonation of alarm in the voice of the yemschick, and Ivan hastened to retrace his steps.

Yerki's cries continued, and guided by his voice the boy soon came within sight of him.

To his astonishment he beheld Yerki buried under a heap of logs, which held him pinned to the ground. Only his head and a part of his body protruded. To add to the danger of the situation, an enormous black bear was approaching.

CHAPTER XIV.

IVAN AND GOSSI FACE TO FACE.

"Courage, Yerki, I will save you!" shouted Ivan, as he saw his yemschick's peril.

Yerki had walked into a great bear-trap built of logs, which was so completely hidden by the snow that the yemschick thought it was a hut.

But the danger now was from the bear.

Ivan leveled his carbine at the monster of the mountains, but the huge animal, rendered savage by hunger, came straight on toward Yerki, uttering fierce growls and evidently bent upon making a meal of the unfortunate fellow.

Ivan took a careful aim.

The click of the trigger was followed by a detonation which echoed through the mountains.

The bear was hit, but the bullet did not reach a vital part, and with a roar of rage bruin came on fiercely.

Brandishing his knife, Ivan leaped forward, but at that supreme moment his foot slipped and he stumbled. Quickly he regained his feet, and threw himself between Yerki and the bear.

As he did so the heavy paws of the huge beast fell upon his shoulders, and forced him to the earth.

"We are both doomed!" cried Yerki, in horror.

But as Ivan went down he aimed a blow at the heart of the mountain monster.

Deep into the body of the bear, just behind the foreleg, the blade of the Siberian hunting-knife was driven, and Ivan gave the blade a wrench as he withdrew it.

The king of Siberian beasts uttered a roar that resounded through the mountain pass like the rumble of thunder.

Then Ivan set to work and soon extricated Yerki from his perilous position.

The boy courier and Yerki, after a few moments' rest, continued their search for a route around the snowfall. The space occupied by the fallen avalanche was considerable, and some time was occupied in picking their way around it.

They accomplished this as soon as possible, and Ivan thought the horses could be led around by the route he had taken. This was done, and leaving the sleigh, the courier and his companion rode forward on horseback.

They rode on in silence, each wrapped in his own thoughts, until the light of the mountain station came in sight.

"There is the station!" announced Yerki, as he caught the first glimmer of the lights in the distance.

They put their horses to the top of their speed and dashed up to the station.

Ivan threw the bridle-rein to the post-boy who came out of the station and entered at once.

As he crossed the threshold Ivan came face to face with Gossi.

The man who carried the death-warrant of the innocent victim of injustice was overtaken at last.

Meanwhile, certain events were transpiring in Petrograd, a knowledge of which would have filled Ivan with terror.

One morning an old Muscovite who dwelt in the country not far beyond Petrograd to the westward was sauntering through the snow thickets which are the cover sought by hares and the Russian winter birds.

The old fellow carried a gun on his shoulder which his son Peter had obtained a permit for him to use. He was the father of Peter Dorkoff, the police spy.

Old Nicholas Dorkoff was a cunning, foxy old scoundrel, but he knew how to curry favor with the great lord on whose domain he lived, and with him he was a favorite, though the peasantry cordially hated him.

"Game is scarce to-day, not a single hare or a solitary bird to be seen anywhere about," said the old fellow.

"Ha!" he exclaimed the next moment, "a bird, as I live. And I never saw its like hereabouts."

He had discovered a bird of considerable size winging its flight at no great elevation.

A moment elapsed, and then the concealed hunter discharged his weapon, and the poor bird, which had been pursuing its flight on tired wings, fell, shot dead.

Old Nicholas darted forward and picked up his game.

"A pigeon! Ah, and a beauty! It must have escaped from some one. Well, never mind, it will be all the same to me when I eat him," said the police spy's father.

He was about to thrust the pigeon into his game-bag when suddenly an exclamation of unbounded surprise escaped his lips.

"What's this? Ah! a cord; and here under his wing is a bit of folded paper which the cord holds in its place. This is a carrier-pigeon, and the paper is a note. Ha! perhaps this is a great discovery."

But the ignorant Muscovite could not read, and after scanning the note curiously, he carefully put it away in his pocket, saying:

"I'll give this paper to Peter to-day when I visit Petrograd to attend the market."

Accident had placed Ivan's letter to Media in the hands of an enemy. If he gave it to Peter Dorkoff the secret that Ivan lived and was still en route for Siberia would certainly be revealed.

Old Nicholas Dorkoff hastened homeward, and keeping his discovery a profound secret, he set out for Petrograd, and only a few hours later he placed Ivan's letter in the hands of his villainous son.

Peter Dorkoff read it, and then in his excitement he danced about the room like a madman, and finally ran to the palace of justice like one demented.

Without waiting to be announced, he burst breathlessly into General Mellikoff's office and placed Ivan's letter to Media before the dreaded head of the "third section," or secret police of Russia.

CHAPTER XV.

MEDIA ARRESTED—IVAN AND GOSSI.

General Mellikoff read Ivan's letter to Media, and the chief of the secret police shared the excitement of the spy to some extent.

"So our suspicions were correct after all, and the boy courier is the messenger chosen by the Nihilists to carry the order of release which they extorted from me to Siberia," he said.

"Yes, and the adroit young traitor has completely deceived your excellency's agents, who reported his death. He will outwit Gossi, too, and Fedor Demetri will be released from the mines and be on the way to China before the truth is known at Timsk unless prompt measures are taken to defeat the plans of the boy courier," replied the spy.

"The boy shall be defeated. But the telegraph, though now repaired beyond Langrod, is not intact beyond the Ural Mountains, and, traveling rapidly, as he naturally would, the boy may have passed the mountains.

"Send me in pursuit of Ivan, the boy courier. General, you can rely on me, and if it is in the power of mortal man to do so I will accomplish his arrest before he reaches the mines," said the spy.

"Very well, you shall have the commission. Make your preparations and start for Siberia within the hour."

"Yes, sire, and about the girl, Media Demetri? The letter we have secured tells us that she is in league with the Nihilists."

"She, too, shall go to Siberia. I have the order of the Czar to exile all persons concerned in the plot to liberate Feodor Demetri."

Peter Dorkoff's eyes flashed with delight.

"Ha! The exile's daughter will be in my power at last!" he muttered triumphantly, as he left the palace of justice a moment subsequently.

An hour later Peter Dorkoff, with Media Demetri a captive, and accompanied by a small escort of Cossacks, was posting at the greatest speed upon the trail of Ivan.

Poor Michael, the cripple toy-maker in his lonely home, made doubly desolate by the seizure of his sister, grieved for her loss most bitterly, and there was consternation among the Nihilists.

As Peter Dorkoff was leaving Petrograd a dark-faced man, who had been upon his trail secretly dogging his footsteps everywhere for days, stole away to General Mellikoff's office, muttering:

"I have made no further discoveries of late, and yet I am sure that my suspicions are correct. Peter Dorkoff has undermined me with the chief, General Mellikoff, and superseded me at the head of the brigade of spies, but I'll yet have my revenge.

"Yes—yes," the fellow continued, "there is some deep mo-

tive at the bottom of Dorkoff's solicitude for the death of Feodor Demetri, and it is fear."

Meanwhile, as Media's captors halted at the first posting station, a tall Cossack captain, who was chief of the escort which had been sent with Peter Dorkoff and his captive, took an opportunity to whisper in the ear of the fair captive when no one was observing him.

The Cossack said:

"Ivan lives. We have the proof that he did not die. Be hopeful—you have a friend near you."

The Cossack glided away before Media could reply, but his whispered words had brought the greatest joy to her heart.

Peter Dorkoff approached Media a moment after she had received the intelligence that Ivan yet lived, and observing the joyful expression which had supplemented the look of despair which her face had worn since her arrest, he was astonished, and he said:

"I see by your face that you are in a more hopeful mood. Perhaps some project for attempting an escape is in your mind, but you need not cherish it."

* * * * *

And now to return to Ivan.

As the boy courier came face to face with Gossi in the public room at the posting-station in the heart of the Ural Mountains his heart thrilled with joy.

The great object which was an important step toward success had been attained in overtaking the courier who carried Feodor Demetri's death-warrant.

Ivan at once began a cunning play.

"How are you, Gossi?" he said, cheerfully.

The other responded in the most friendly manner, and the two couriers shook hands warmly.

Then they adjourned to a private room, and seating themselves before a hearth, where a splendid fire burned in a huge, deep fireplace, they entered into an animated conversation.

Of course Gossi entertained not the slightest suspicion of Ivan.

Ivan entertained his companion with stories of adventures on the road, and Gossi responded by relating his own experiences.

Ivan knew that Gossi was very egotistical, and that he considered himself the most important courier in the service of the Czar.

"I don't suppose now, Gossi, that you ever carried as important a dispatch in all your life as I have," Ivan said in conclusion.

"On the contrary, I am sure you were never intrusted with a dispatch half as important as one containing the death-warrant of the chief of all the Nihilists," replied Gossi, haughtily.

"Oh, you are trying to make me believe a fable. You never carried such a dispatch, I'll wager a dozen roubles."

"Done! I have the dispatch with me now. The money is mine. There, the paper is not sealed, you can see it for yourself!" cried Gossi, triumphantly.

As he spoke Gossi placed the death-warrant of Feodor Demetri in Ivan's hands.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FIGHT FOR THE DEATH-WARRANT—ALMOST A TRAGEDY.

"Now, then, what do you say, Ivan? Is not that paper just what I said it was?" demanded Gossi, as the boy courier scrutinized the death-warrant of Feodor Demetri which he had placed in his hands.

Ivan drew nearer to Gossi, and dropping his voice almost to a whisper, he said earnestly:

"If by any accident the execution of Feodor Demetri was delayed a judicial crime might be prevented, and Demetri be saved."

"What mean you? Ah, do you mean to propose to me an act of treason?"

"Slowly, Gossi, slowly. You are a poor man, are you not?"

"You know well enough that I am. Why do you ask that question?"

"You would like to become suddenly rich?"

"I am no fool. Of course. Who would not?"

"I can enrich you."

"You! Why, you are as poor as myself."

"Then see here," said Ivan, and he produced a bag of gold which had been contributed by the Nihilists of Russia to be used to save their chief."

"It is gold, and a fortune!" exclaimed Gossi, as Ivan opened the bag and exhibited its contents.

"This gold is to be the price of Feodor Demetri's life!"

Gossi stared.

"Ah, I understand you now! You are tempting me to prove unfaithful to my trust."

"I ask you to do no wrong. Merely to serve the ends of right and justice, and the gold is yours."

"Speak plainly. Tell me just what you want."

"Give me Feodor Demetri's death-warrant and the gold is yours."

"That would be treason. No, no, I cannot do it."

"But the prayers of the orphaned and fatherless will be yours. A life of happiness. Hear my plan. You cannot be blamed. You will say the death-warrant was stolen from you."

"And by whom?"

"By me. Tell our tyrant master that Ivan, the boy courier of Siberia, robbed you of the death-warrant to save an innocent man."

"You are mad! Ivan, you are courting your own doom."

"Do you still refuse?"

"Yes."

"Can nothing move you? You know that innocent men are sent to Siberia every day. I beg, I beseech you, help me to save a noble life and heaven will reward you. Oh, Gossi, listen to me! Do me this favor. I am risking my life for the right—only grant me this and heaven will surely protect you."

"No, no. My resolution is taken. It shall never be said that Gossi sold himself for gold. Give me the death-warrant," said Gossi, presently.

Ivan was on his feet now, and he had thrust the bag of gold into his bosom. There was a small table between himself and Gossi, and the boy courier stood with his back to the hearth.

He heard a sound from beyond the closed door which was a signal from Yerki that he was there, and that fresh horses were at the door.

In his left hand Ivan clutched the death-warrant.

"Gossi," he said, in a voice which made the other start and sent a thrill of alarm through his stalwart frame, "I have begged of you, I have implored you in vain. I have sworn to save Feodor Demetri, and my life will be sacrificed if need be. I will never surrender the death-warrant! You shall never carry it to the prison-mines!" cried Ivan.

"Traitor! Would you rob me? Ha! I'll have the warrant or I'll have your life!" hissed Gossi, his face paling with rage and alarm.

The next moment the table was overturned and Gossi made an attempt to seize the boy courier.

But Ivan had formed his plans carefully in advance, and he was not to be foiled now.

As the table was overturned with a crash he bounded backward upon the hearth, and as Gossi's arm was outstretched to grasp him he thrust the death-warrant of Feodor Demetri into the glowing coals.

In an instant the paper was in flames and reduced to ashes.

Gossi's rage maddened him as he witnessed the destruction of the warrant of death which had been intrusted to his care.

"Traitor, you have betrayed me! I will kill you!" he shouted.

Gossi grasped the boy courier by the throat and hurled him upon the floor. A clubbed cavalry pistol in his hand descended upon the head of the devoted boy.

Once, twice, thrice with sickening thuds the pistol fell, and then Gossi sprang away, but he turned to look back at Ivan, who lay motionless, like one dead, covered with blood.

At that moment Yerki burst into the room with his heavy carbine in hand, and leveling the weapon at Gossi's head, he shouted:

"Halt, murderer, or I fire!"

Yerki had seen the body of his young master on the floor, and he believed that he was dead.

Gossi recoiled before the leveled weapon of the yemschick and the succeeding moment the people of the posting-station thronged into the room.

"Arrest that man, Gossi, the courier. He has killed my master!" cried Yerki.

"Well, we have no authority to arrest or hold a courier of the Czar without a special order. But if you value your life, Gossi, leave at once, or Ivan's friends may take their vengeance upon you," said the officer of the posting-station, when the feldsheer, or post surgeon, had examined Ivan, as he immediately did, and stated that he would recover.

Gossi lost no time in repairing to the telegraph office, where he sent a message toward Petrograd, and also one toward Timsk, denouncing Ivan.

CHAPTER XVII.

FIVE DAYS LOST—THE ZINGARO ROBBERS.

But the telegraph dispatches sent by Gossi did not go far. Yerki, acting upon instructions received in advance from Ivan, had cut the single wire of the telegraph line in each direction beyond the mountain posting-station.

As soon as he had sent his two dispatches Gossi left the station in his posting-sledge and followed the route to Siberia.

And now what of the grand young hero of Russia? How seriously was he injured by the brutal attack of Gossi, and will he be long delayed at the posting-station in the heart of the Ural Mountains?

These questions are of vital importance, notwithstanding the destruction of the death-warrant, for Peter Dorkoff, the police spy, is now posting forward upon Ivan's trail with an order from the Czar to arrest him at sight.

The feldsheer, aided by Yerki, succeeded in restoring Ivan to consciousness in a very short time, but the poor lad's mind wandered and he soon became delirious.

In his delirium the boy talked wildly of many things, and as he told of the doings of the Nihilists and his mission to the mines, Yerki was in an agony of fear lest the suspicion of the surgeon should be aroused.

On the morning of the fourth day after he took to his bed Ivan's fever left him and he became rational again.

His first words were: "Order the horses. We must be off."

Then he tried to arise, but fell back upon his pillow too weak to do so.

Then the surgeon came to Ivan's bedside and addressed him kindly.

Ivan thanked him for all he had done for him, and feeling his bag of gold under his pillow, which Yerki had concealed there, he produced a number of roubles without showing that he had a large sum of money with him, and forced the good feldsheer to accept them.

"And now we must start at once," said Ivan, finally.

"No. Impossible. You must wait two days longer. Then, if you continue to improve, you may go."

"I will obey. That will make five days lost."

"Better the loss of a little time than the loss of your life."

The two days which the post surgeon said must elapse before the boy courier could resume his journey passed, and on the morning of the third day, his strength much improved, Ivan once more took the road.

On—on through the land of ever-present misery the noble youth continued, and the Ural Mountains were left behind, and Siberia proper was entered.

Meanwhile Peter Dorkoff was traveling at such speed as couriers seldom attained. He used the telegraph at every station to send a warning of his advance to the next relay house, and so fresh horses stood at the door when he arrived.

Media was not molested by her captor. The necessity for haste gave him no time to annoy the exile's daughter with his attentions.

Three days' journey from the mountain posting-station where he had the thrilling encounter with Gossi, Ivan found himself journeying through a desolate lowland country, and one evening, much to his surprise, he saw a posting-sledge coming from the direction in which he was bound.

The boy's wonder was immeasurably increased when the sledge was suddenly turned aside and driven swiftly away over the trackless steppes when it seemed its occupants had discovered him.

"That was the outfit of a government courier, but the gayly dressed persons in it were surely Zingaros or Gypsies," said Ivan, addressing Yerki.

"You are quite right, little father. I should have told you the people at the last station informed me that a band of Zingaro robbers infested these lowlands."

"Ah, then the rascals may have assassinated a courier and stolen his sledge. Yes, that must be it."

"And perhaps Gossi was the victim."

"I trust not. He does his duty as he understands it."

"I have not forgiven him for the blows he dealt you, little father. But we must be upon the alert. The Zingaro robbers are terrible fellows, and they may lay in ambush to attack us"

"True. Look to your arms, Yerki, and I will do the same. The station we are making for is several versts ahead, and the night will be upon us before we reach it."

"Yes, and that, too, though we put our horses to the top of their speed."

Yerki cracked his whip, calling out to his horses:

"Come, now, my doves, make haste! On, you sluggards!"

They were approaching a strip of timber where the stunted trees would afford concealment if any one wished to hide, and it seemed to be just the place for an ambush.

As the boy courier's sleigh entered the snowy woods a wild shout rang out, and half a dozen dark forms leaped into view.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ATTACK OF THE ZINGAROS—AT THE MINES—PERIL.

"The Zingaros—the Zingaros!" cried Yerki.

"Put the whip to the horses and try to drive through them. If they stop us we are lost," cried Ivan.

Yerki plied the whip furiously, and under the stinging lash the horses dashed forward more rapidly than before.

The Zingaros, uttering wild shouts in their shrill, penetrating voices, rushed at the horses' heads.

Ivan sprang to his feet, and snatching up his carbine, discharged it over the heads of the flying animals at the onrushing robbers.

One of their number fell.

At that moment one of the desperate Zingaro robbers, heedless of the fate of his comrade, made an effort to clutch the flying team by the bits, but was shaken off by the horse.

The Zingaro band was soon left far behind and the danger was passed.

Some versts further on the route wound through a hilly country, and as the night fell and the stars came out the travelers saw several gaunt wolves digging the snow at the foot of a steep declivity.

As the sledge of the courier drew nearer Ivan and Yerki saw that the wolves had disinterred some object from its burial place under the snow.

They came yet closer, and to their horror they saw that the object which the wolves had found was the body of a man.

"Gossi!" exclaimed the yemshick in a tone of horror as he recognized the garments of the courier, who wore the regulation uniform of an imperial messenger.

Ivan had reloaded his own and the yemshick's carbines, and a volley from these weapons scattered the few wolves about the remains of Gossi.

Then Ivan and Yerki lifted the body into the sleigh, covered it reverently with a robe, and continued onward.

They arrived at the next station in safety, and reported the attack of the Zingaros. As they had supposed would be the case, a company of mounted Cossacks were at once dispatched in pursuit of the Zingaros.

A rude grave was prepared for Gossi, and that night his remains were consigned to their last resting-place according to the rites of the Russian church.

Upon the person of the dead courier were found the wounds made by the spears of the Zingaros, so there was no question as to the cause of his death.

After this the boy courier continued his journey for days without remarkable adventures of any kind. The banks of the Irtysh River were reached, and then the last stages of the terrible journey were begun toward the prison-mines of Timsk, which are located among the mountains at the northern extremity of Lake Baikal.

The town of Timsk is a place of but a few hundred inhabitants, many of whom are exiles condemned to a terrible existence.

It was there at Timsk that the patriot leader, Feodor Demetri, was now buried in the mines under the Baikal Mountains, more than two thousand miles from Petrograd.

One bright sunshiny morning Ivan and Yerki entered the town of Timsk.

Without delay the boy courier repaired to the residence of the governor of Timsk, who represented the supreme authority of the Czar at the prison-mines.

The official received Ivan pleasantly and with courtesy, as was due an imperial messenger, and the boy placed the order for the release of Feodor Demetri in his hands.

"Ah, our mighty sire, the Russian ruler, great Alexander, is merciful and just. His royal will shall be obeyed. The order states that the prisoner must be surrendered at once," said the governor.

The orders of the Czar are never questioned in Russia.

The governor did not inquire how it came about that the Czar ordered the liberation of the captive.

The governor, accompanied by the Cossack guard, led Ivan

to the mines, while Yerki, who had received his orders, was making a number of purchases in the town, and securing a team of the best horses that gold could purchase.

Of course, when liberated from the mines, Feodor Demetri would not be safe anywhere within the confines of Russian territory.

Ivan's conductor led him to a dark defile where mounted guards stood on sentinel duty night and day, and thence to the mouth of the mine.

At a word of command from the governor the great iron door of the prison-mines was swung open and the interior, dark as Egypt, was revealed.

But presently a light from within illumined the mine, as the doorkeeper pulled a bell-wire, and one of the superintendents of the underground prison came forward.

"Prisoner No. 704 is wanted," said the governor.

"Yes, your excellency." With a salute the mine superintendent retired, and a few moments subsequently a long-bearded man, who looked more like a specter than a living human being, was led out of the mine by two brutal-looking guards.

Ivan recognized Media's father despite the terrible alteration imprisonment had wrought in his appearance.

"Feodor Demetri, it is the will of the Emperor of Russia, the mighty Czar Alexander II., that you be restored to liberty, and you are hereby discharged. Here is your passport, and you are at liberty to go to your home in Petrograd, or where you will," said the governor, and he placed a passport in Demetri's hands.

At that moment Ivan heard the clatter of hoofs, and he caught a glimpse of a horseman, who was riding from the town at full speed.

He was Peter Dorkoff, the police spy!

CHAPTER XIX.

DORKOFF ON THE TRAIL.

The discovery of Peter Dorkoff was a terrible blow to Ivan. He comprehended the immensity of the danger which the presence of the police spy must entail.

With considerable effort Ivan succeeded in composing himself to some degree almost instantly. He felt that the greatest peril of all was before him now, and he strove to meet it bravely. There was a certainty in his heart that Peter Dorkoff had come to denounce him. If he did so, Ivan believed that the fate of Feodor Demetri, as well as his own doom, was sealed.

He thought fast.

"Feodor Demetri, we will proceed to the town," said Ivan, and his hand sought his revolver. At that moment he had resolved, if need be, the life of a villainous spy of the Russian tyrant should be sacrificed to save the innocent.

But as the boy spoke, to the ears of all came the detonation of a discharged carbine.

The report was near at hand, and it had evidently been discharged on the road leading to Timsk.

"What is that? There are no convicts of the mines out at this hour! Who can have fired that shot?" exclaimed the governor.

The succeeding moment the clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard upon the flinty road-bed, and a riderless horse was seen dashing toward the defile and the mouth of the prison-mines.

Ivan saw the frightened animal was the horse which had been ridden by Peter Dorkoff, and a sudden revulsion of hope came upon him. He remembered he had left Yerki in the town.

The boy courier and the liberated prisoner started forward on the road to Timsk, and while some of the mine-guards secured the runaway horse, the governor and others accompanied Ivan and Demetri.

At but a short distance from the mouth of the mines they discovered the body of a man lying motionless in the center of the road.

Drawing nearer, Ivan and Feodor Demetri recognized Peter Dorkoff. But the police spy was a stranger to the others, and they, of course, suspected not his identity.

The spy was not dead, but he was unconscious.

"Who is he?" demanded the governor, when Dorkoff had been examined.

No one could answer, for Ivan and Demetri, of course, would not. Efforts were made to revive the insensible man, and while the governor and the guards remained with him, Ivan excused himself, and hurried on with Feodor Demetri in the direction of Timsk.

In a moment they rounded the bend in the road, and were out of sight of the governor and his party.

"Now, then, it is a race for life. Forward!" cried Ivan, as soon as he and his companion were out of sight.

They sprang away, but they had not run far when a man leaped out of the undergrowth which bordered the trail.

"Yerki!" exclaimed Ivan, as he recognized his faithful yem-schick.

"Yes, I am here, little father, and it was I who unhorsed Peter Dorkoff. I shot at him, and I only hope he will never send another innocent person to Siberia."

They all ran forward, and when the town was almost reached, Yerki turned aside into a wide road through the Baikal forest, and as he pointed to a sledge, to which was attached a pair of spirited-looking horses, he cried exultantly:

"Here we are! I had everything ready when I saw Dorkoff riding toward the governor's house."

The three entered the sledge, and Yerki cracked his whip and started his team forward at a rapid pace.

They knew that the frontier beyond the great Altai Mountains, which they must pass before they left the land of snow-flakes behind and reached the fragrant tea gardens of China, were guarded by a fierce patrol of bronzed mountaineers, who were the watchdogs of the Czar.

But at the present moment the thoughts of the escaping ones were more of the peril to be anticipated from pursuit than aught else.

The day was cold and the snow had begun to fall.

Ivan told the story of the successful plot which had compelled General Mellikoff to sign the order of release.

Media's father expressed his admiration for his daring colleagues, and his gratitude was evinced by his feeling words.

Neither of the fugitives had the least suspicion that Media was at that moment a captive in the town which they were leaving, or an attempt would have been made to rescue her at all hazards.

Meanwhile, thrilling incidents were occurring in the town of Timsk.

It was found, upon close examination, that Peter Dorkoff had been slightly wounded in the head by a glancing bullet, and after something less than an hour's time had been consumed in striving to revive him, the efforts made to that end were rewarded with success, and the police spy became conscious.

"Who are you, stranger?" asked the governor.

"Peter Dorkoff, of St. Petersburg, special messenger from the Czar, and I have with me an order for the arrest of Ivan Lavaniski, the boy courier of Siberia, who has in his possession a warrant for the release of Feodor Demetri. Here is the paper."

The governor turned pale.

"The boy courier presented a genuine order for the release of Feodor Demetri, and I obeyed the command. Feodor Demetri was released from the mines an hour ago, and he left in the company of Ivan," said the governor.

"The order was extorted from General Mellikoff. But hasten. The chances are the boy and Demetri have fled from the town. They must be instantly pursued," cried Dorkoff.

"It shall be as you say."

"Place a command of Cossacks at my disposal, and I will lead the chase."

The next moment the sharp clang! clang! of the great alarm bell at the mines rang out, and hearing it every one in Timsk knew that a prisoner had escaped.

The police spy was liberally supplied with vodka and drank eagerly. The fiery stimulant gave him strength, and he hastened to the town and at the head of a company of Cossacks searched all the village through in a short time.

No trace of Ivan or Demetri being discovered, Dorkoff knew they had fled, and he finally learned that Yerki had purchased a fast team and a supply of articles such as fugitives would need during a long winter's journey.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FUGITIVES CAPTURED.

The start which Ivan and his companions had obtained was an excellent one, and they were hopeful, but fortune was fickle, and the mounted Cossack band, headed by the vindictive Peter Dorkoff, gained upon them rapidly, though they knew it not.

Nightfall found the fugitives traversing a wild mountain pass, where immense cornices of snow hung from the crags, and threatened to fall at any moment.

Suddenly the yem-schick drew up his team.

"What is it, Yerki?" asked Ivan.

"Ah," he added, before the driver could reply. "Sounds from the rear. Our pursuers are coming."

"The Cossacks!" said Feodor Demetri.

"Yes, and Peter Dorkoff, who swore away your life, is with them, I'll wager."

"Forward, my children! On, my lambs!" cried Yerki.

The horses dashed forward again, and though the yem-schick kept them at full speed the sounds of pursuit momentarily grew louder and louder, and as Ivan and Demetri glanced backward, while they clutched their carbines, they all at once caught a glimpse of their pursuers in the distance. The fugitives were sighted by Peter Dorkoff and the Cossacks at the same time that the former discovered them.

The fugitives were not yet out of the pass when they heard a strange, crashing noise.

It came from the mountainside, and Yerki uttered a terrible cry of alarm as he now suddenly sought to stay the onward rush of his team.

"The avalanche—the avalanche!" screamed the yem-schick.

Ivan and Demetri turned pale as they heard Yerki cry, for they knew that the greatest peril of life in Siberia was coming.

Glancing at the mountainside, Ivan and Demetri saw that its entire surface seemed to be in motion, and the vast accumulation of snow was sliding straight down toward the pass through which the route of escape lay.

The succeeding moment, while cries of terror trembled upon the fugitives' lips, the avalanche struck the pass.

But Yerki had now stopped his horses.

The fugitives were saved as by a miracle. Not ten paces in advance of them the avalanche blocked the pass with a mountain of snow, and their escape was cut off.

The Cossacks came dashing up.

Dorkoff shouted exultantly:

"Caught at last! Back with them to the prison-mines. Wheel your team about, yem-schick, or you'll receive a taste of the knout—our whip with many lashes."

Yerki obeyed the police spy's orders.

Pale as death, but with an expression of resolution upon his face, Ivan flashed a look of intense hatred upon Peter Dorkoff, and he hissed:

"This is your work, coward, but Heaven will hear our prayers, and your day of punishment shall yet come!"

"Bah! In the dark chambers of the prison-mines, under the lash of the knout in the hands of guards who never spare the slaves under them, you will have time to regret your treason, and, meanwhile, for your consolation, you can think how happy I am with the fair Media, who is in my power here in Timsk," said Dorkoff, tauntingly.

"Media here in Timsk?" asked Ivan.

"Ah, my gallant Ivan, you do not believe me. Well, you shall see for yourself what a nice little surprise I have for you when we pass the ostrog in the town."

Ivan said no more, but he breathed a silent prayer, which was a fervent supplication that Media might be protected in the midst of the perils which menaced her if Dorkoff spoke the truth.

The journey back to Timsk was made without further incidents of importance.

As the convoy was passing the ostrog, Ivan kept his eyes fixed upon the windows of the building.

Suddenly he beheld a beautiful face at one of the windows, and he recognized one who was very dear to him. At the same moment he was discovered by the fair watcher at the window, and she cried out impulsively:

"Ivan! Ivan! save me!"

Media, for she it was, of course, stretched out her arms imploringly.

"Media, I am powerless. I am a prisoner like yourself and your father who is at my side. All is lost," replied Ivan.

"Father! father!" screamed Media, excitedly, as she saw and recognized her sire. Then she threw up her arms and suddenly disappeared from the window.

Media sank upon the floor of the ostrog in a dead faint, and Ivan and his companions were hurried on to the mines.

They soon reached the iron door of the terrible underground prison.

Feodor Demetri was handed over to the guards, to whom the necessary explanation had previously been given, and he was marched into the mines.

"We shall meet in the dark prison, noble boy," said Feodor Demetri, as he re-entered the mines between two guards.

Then Ivan and Yerki were compelled to don the garb of the convicts of the mines, and each was given a number stamped upon a tin plate, and fastened upon their bosoms. Then they, too, were marched into the prison-mines, and Peter Dorkoff

congratulated himself that they were lost to the outer world forever.

That night Yerki and the noble boy who had sacrificed his own liberty in the attempt to save another, lay in their cells in the mines listening to the stories of blighted lives told by unseen speakers.

But presently a voice they both recognized as that of Feodor Demetri came to their ears.

Ivan answered, and then Media's father crept to their side.

"I have great news for you, Ivan. Have you ever heard of the League of the Russian Prison Mines?" he said.

"Yes," replied the boy courier.

"Very well, for a long time the members of the league of this particular mine have been hatching a plan of revolt. Everything is now in readiness. When the great clock inside the entrance of the mine tolls the midnight hour the attempt will be made.

"The night watch in the dark passages of the mines have already been disposed of, they have been bound and gagged, and the three hundred captives of this underground prison are assembling in the main passages, armed with picks, iron bars, and implements of all kinds they can lay their hands on. We will join them, and if we once get out of the mine we will make another attempt at flight, and Media may yet be saved."

Feodor Demetri led the way from the prison cell and Ivan and Yerki followed him.

In the passage upon which they entered they joined the ranks of the band of exiles there assembled.

Some moments elapsed, and then the great clock of the mines began to toll.

"Forward! Now for liberty or death!" shouted a ringing voice out of the darkness.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GREAT REVOLT OF THE LEAGUE OF THE PRISON-MINES.

As the exiles thronged into the area of the light cast by the lamps at the door, a shout of alarm went up from the guards. The sight of the multitude of desperate men who had charged forward in silence was the first intimation the guards had of the great revolt.

With cries of consternation they discharged their carbines at the mass of humanity which was sweeping down upon them. Some of the exiles fell, but the charge was not stayed, and forward rushed the determined band inspired by the hope of escape and burning with the desire for vengeance.

The guards' only way of escape lay through the iron doors, and they threw them open and dashed out of the mines.

A wild shout went up from three hundred throats, and out of the mines in pursuit of the terror-stricken guards dashed the prisoners of the underground world.

But a moment subsequently the great alarm bell began to ring.

A band of Cossacks stationed near the mouth of the mines sprang to arms and charged down upon the escaping ones.

Then a fierce conflict ensued between them and the exiles.

Meanwhile Ivan, Feodor Demetri and Yerki, who were among the first to leave the mines, intent upon the rescue of Media, stole away and hastened toward the town.

The ringing of the bell had alarmed the gendarmes quartered in Timsk, and our friends had not traversed more than half the distance to the town when they heard the troops stationed there coming.

Scarcely had they crept into a hiding-place when the mounted gendarmes from the town dashed by them.

The moment they were out of sight the fugitives resumed their way toward the town. Making a detour they reached the rear of the ostrog.

Then Yerki made a scout around the building, and, returning in a moment or so, he reported that there were only two guards who were stationed at the door anywhere to be seen.

Then they crept stealthily forward, keeping in the shadows of the building where they were entirely concealed, and suddenly, when they were near enough, they sprang forward, brandishing the tools which they had brought with them from the mines.

The Cossacks at the door—for such the guards were—levelled their weapons at the three friends who were bent upon accomplishing Media's rescue, but as their faces came into view the taller of the Cossacks struck up his companion's weapon and lowered his own.

Ivan and the others were amazed.

But the succeeding instant the mystery was explained.

The tall Cossack—who was the secret friend who had ac-

companied Media all the way from Petrograd—gave the hailing signal of the Nihilists.

Ivan advanced quickly, and as he did so the other guard also gave the signal of the great order of Russian liberty.

"You are brothers?" exclaimed Ivan.

"Yes, and we were ordered by the Chief Mavernish to accompany Media Demetri into exile and to protect her. The order is mighty."

Then the Cossack glided into the ostrog.

Presently he returned, accompanied by Media.

Upon the meeting which ensued we need not dwell. The joy of that reunion cannot be told; suffice it to say that when the first moment or so had elapsed, Ivan cried:

"Come—we must away."

"You will find your team and sleigh in the ostrog yonder," said the Cossack.

Five minutes after they reached the ostrog station, the fugitives were once more speeding away on the route to China, but they did not follow the road which was blocked by the fallen avalanche.

The route which the boy courier selected this time was an old trail seldom used, which he had traversed when a mere child, at the time when his home was among the wild Baikal Mountains.

There was no telegraph along this road, and Ivan said, exultantly:

"There is no fear of our being headed off by a dispatch. A single wire more than eight thousand versts in length alone affords communication between the western and eastern frontiers of Siberia. We will not come near the telegraph for some time."

As the escaping ones sped away, they heard the sounds of a conflict which was in progress between the gendarmes and the exiles who had revolted and broken out of the prison-mines.

While they continued swiftly on their way the fugitives conversed earnestly, and Media told how she had been arrested and hurried away.

Peter Dorkoff had told her how the note Ivan had sent from Orloff had fallen into his hands, and so the boy understood how it came about that the police spy was sent in pursuit of him.

As we have previously taken occasion to inform the reader, Ivan was familiar with Siberia, and particularly the very portion of the great prison land which he was now traversing. Thus it was that he proved an excellent guide—the best, indeed, that the escaping ones could have obtained. All the mysterious trails of the mountains were known to Ivan.

Hour after hour went by, and still there was no sound of pursuit, and the fugitives were gaining an excellent start.

But just about an hour after sunrise Yerki suddenly commanded silence, and as all listened they heard the sound of many tinkling bells approaching from the direction in which they were going.

"A caravan on its way from Irkutsh!" cried Ivan.

"If it passes us without our being discovered we may think ourselves lucky. Turn aside and drive into the snowy woods," he added, and Yerki obeyed.

In the shelter of the woods the fugitives, with pistols drawn, waited in breathless suspense for the caravan.

CHAPTER XXII.

AMONG THE MOUNTAINS.

Nearer and nearer came the sounds of the approaching caravan, and Ivan whispered:

"The avalanche which blocks the other road has caused them to turn aside and follow this unfrequented trail. I think they must have a Baikal mountaineer for a guide."

In a moment the head of the caravan came in sight. It consisted of a motley throng of traders, merchants and speculators from the north, and from their conversation, which reached the hearing of the concealed fugitives, they concluded that the party was returning from the fair which is held annually in Irkutsk.

The caravan slowly passed, and the fugitives experienced a feeling of the greatest relief as the last of the party disappeared from their sight.

Meanwhile, at the prison-mines exciting scenes were transpiring. Thanks to the thorough organization of the great revolt which had been brought about by the league of the prison-mines, the uprising of the victims of tyranny was successful to some extent.

The convicts soon routed the Cossack guards at the mines

by sheer force of overwhelming numbers, and then before the arrival of the gendarmes from the town of Timsk, they made a raid upon the arsenal and store-house, which was located near the mouth of the mines, and then they fled the vicinity.

The gendarmes and the Cossacks pursued the escaping exiles, but they were obliged to divide their forces, thus weakening their strength, and we learn from the record of the great revolt that many of the exiles were never recaptured.

Peter Dorkoff was intent only upon the capture of Ivan and his party, and as soon as the battle of the mines was ended the police spy set about seeking clues whereby the boy courier and his friends might be traced.

The long experiences of the spy of the "third section" well fitted him for the task of a secret tracker, and he was not long in taking up the trail of the fugitives again.

First he visited the ostrog, for he surmised that Ivan and Media's father would not desert the poor girl whom he had brought to Siberia.

When Peter Dorkoff found that Media had escaped, his rage was boundless, and he accused the Cossacks who had been placed on guard of the temporary prison of treachery.

Peter Dorkoff lost no time in organizing a pursuit, and accompanied by a strong party of mounted Cossacks, he took the very route Ivan and his party had selected.

An old Baikal mountaineer was found to serve as a guide, and as the latter was familiar with every hidden trail and mysterious pathway among the wild mountains, the spy believed that he would yet run down the fugitives.

But fortune favored the escaping ones.

The Baikal mountaineer whom Peter Dorkoff had secured to guide his band upon the trail of the fugitives was an old friend of the boy courier's family, and in former days, when Ivan's home was among the mountains, he had dwelt near the young courier.

The Burait was determined to save Ivan. The mountain dwellers are clannish, and devoted to each other. The Buraites are half-civilized, wild and fearless, and they have never been subdued by the Czar.

The old mountaineer, acting upon his resolution to serve his boy countryman, purposely led the Cossack band, headed by Peter Dorkoff, astray, and thus it was that the fugitives obtained the start which caused them to hope that their escape to China might finally be accomplished.

But Peter Dorkoff was as cunning as a fox, and he soon discovered that the mountain guide was not leading him in a direct route. His suspicions were aroused, and the guide was directed to find the right trail or be sent back to the mines in irons under the accusation of treachery.

The poor fellow became terrified as he thought of his family alone in their mountain hut, who would perish of hunger if harm came to him, and he yielded and finally led Peter Dorkoff upon the right trail.

But the guide was plotting revenge and he meant yet to serve the boy courier.

"Wait until we reach the heart of the great mountains, and then I will show these fellows something that will surprise them, perhaps. A single blast of my Baikal horn will yet call my brethren to Ivan's assistance, it may be," thought the mountaineer.

The Cossack bloodhounds on Ivan's trail proceeded swiftly when they were guided aright, and Peter Dorkoff was still sure he would yet overtake the fugitives, and drag them back to Timsk.

But, in the meantime, how was Ivan's party faring?

Night was closing down upon the forest, and amid the mysterious shadows of the snow-clad trees stealthy riders were closing upon the trail of the exiles.

Suddenly the sound of a horn echoed through the forest.

Exclamations of surprise and alarm fell from the lips of all the party except Ivan.

"What is that? Is it a bugle call of our enemies?" asked Feodor Demetri.

Before Ivan could reply to this question a band of wild Buraites dashed out of the wood and surrounded them. Feodor Demetri leveled his carbine, but before he could discharge the weapon the boy courier struck it up, saying:

"Hold! Do not fire, for your life!"

In amazement the exile dropped his weapon, and then, as the fierce mountain dwellers closed in about the fugitives upon all sides, Ivan cried:

"Malmach. Ho, hetman! Have you forgotten Ivan Lavaniski? I am he, and these companions of mine are friends."

A tall mountaineer clothed in bearskin, and wearing boots of bull's hide which reached almost to his waist, reined up to

Ivan's side and, leaning forward, peered into the latter's face with a keen and searching glance as the latter sat in the sledge.

Then he uttered a guttural cry and extended his hand, saying:

"The little hetman of the Baikals. Ah, Malmach did not expect to meet him here. But he is welcome, and the freedom of the mountains is his. Here, take this horn and use it if you need it to call assistance on your way."

As he spoke he placed a Baikal horn in the hands of the boy courier.

"A thousand thanks, Hetman Malmach. You are an old friend ever to be relied upon."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CONTENTS OF THE MYSTERIOUS PACKAGE—THE COSSACKS AND BURAITES.

The flight of the fugitives was steadily continued, but they were obliged to halt from time to time in order to rest their horses. One night they camped in a gorge where Ivan discovered the tracks of sabres and matrons.

All night long the exiles had heard the howling of the wolves in the distance, and they had taken turns in standing guard about the little camp which they had made.

As the sleigh glided forward over the frosty snow several versts from the scene of their camping-place, the exiles heard the howls of the wolves drawing nearer, and they soon knew that the wolves had scented them out and were following the sledge.

The yemschick urged his horses to increased speed, but all his attempts to distance the pursuing wolves were futile.

Soon the fierce animals, numbering hundreds, were in sight, stretched out in a long line behind them. The moment the vanguard of the wolfish legion came out in range, Ivan and Feodor Demetri opened fire upon them.

But the wolves were not checked. As soon as one fell a score of fierce creatures bounded forward to take his place.

"There is hope yet!" cried Ivan, and his friends thought he was mad.

Quickly he drew the package, which he had carried so carefully all the way from the Russian capital, out from beneath one of the seats of the sleigh, and tore it open.

A number of conical metallic objects were revealed.

"What are they?" cried Yerki.

For answer Ivan poised one of the metal cones above his head for an instant, and then hurled it among the wolves with terrific force.

The result was astonishing.

There was a loud explosion, and a dozen wolves were blown into the air, mangled and dismembered.

"Explosive bombs!" cried Yerki.

"Infernal machines!" said Demetri.

Such they were.

Ivan hurled another and another bomb among the wolves with frightful results.

The reports of the explosives and the fearful slaughter which attended the same frightened the wolves, and they were dispersed as by the charge of scores of riflemen pouring destructive volleys upon them.

The infernal machines of the Nihilists had saved the fugitives when all seemed lost, and they joyfully congratulated themselves that Providence had not deserted them.

"Mavernich told me to use the bombs to save my life, if I found myself placed in a situation of peril, where all other means failed. I might have hurled them among the Cossacks who captured us when the fall of the avalanche blocked our pathway, but I could not bring myself to slaughter human creatures in such a terrible way, although they were my enemies," said the boy courier.

"But what is that?" asked Demetri.

Ivan and Yerki turned quickly in the same direction as Feodor Demetri spoke, and the keen-eyed Siberian boy exclaimed:

"They are horsemen!"

"And Cossacks," added Yerki.

"That means they are our enemies. Our horses are exhausted by the race which we gave them in trying to escape from the wolves. What is to be done? We will surely be overtaken," said Demetri.

As he spoke there came a sound from the adjacent mountainside, which Ivan instantly recognized as the blast of a Baikal horn.

At once he placed the horn which the old Burait bandit had given him to his lips and blew an answering blast.

"Our only chance is in obtaining assistance from the mountaineers," said Ivan.

He knew his countrymen would not hesitate to charge the Cossacks to protect a brother.

Nearer and nearer approached the exiles' determined foes, and they presently distinguished the shrill voice of Peter Dorkoff, the police spy.

And while the Cossacks were coming up there was another party approaching. The Buraits of the mountains were gathering, and Ivan heard them riding through the timber down the steep declivity toward him.

"Halt! Halt in the name of the Czar!" yelled Peter Dorkoff, when he was near enough to make himself heard.

The wretch was sure of his prey now.

Out of the timber upon the mountainside dashed a score of mounted Buraits.

"Save us from our foes who are rushing down upon us, brothers. I am Ivan, the son of Lavaniski, the hetman of the Baikals," cried the boy courier.

"It shall be so," replied the leader of the fierce mountaineers, and then, as the Cossacks, led by Peter Dorkoff, came dashing up the mountain riders charged the spy and his band like a thunderbolt.

There were yells, and the clash of steel mingled with the report of firearms, but the Cossacks were driven back, and for a moment they were thrown into confusion, and their retreat became a flight.

Most of the Buraits pursued the Cossacks, but the hetman of the party and four followers remained behind.

"We require a change of horses. Yours are fresh. Our animals are jaded, as are also those of our pursuers. Give us two of your best animals and take ours. Then hold the Cossacks back for an hour or two, and we may be saved yet," said Ivan, speaking rapidly.

All depended upon the Burait's answer.

Would he grant Ivan's request?

CHAPTER XXIV.

IRKUTSK REACHED—IVAN AND YERKI IN DISGUISE.

The cunning Burait hetman hesitated for a moment.

He had heard the police spy call upon Ivan, the boy courier, to halt in the name of the Czar, and although, as we have mentioned, the authority of the emperor is not always respected by the Baikal mountaineers, the man who had brought his band to Ivan's assistance knew that it was treason to aid the escape of a fugitive from the mines, and there was that in the appearance of Feodor Demetri which betrayed that he had recently escaped.

"Come—come! Will you aid the innocent as I have asked, or must this wronged man and his innocent child be dragged back to a fate worse than death for both?" cried Ivan.

"No. Let the tyrant do his worst. I never refuse the request of a brother. The horses are yours," said the chief, finally.

Then quickly two of his men dismounted and their horses were exchanged for those attached to the sleigh.

The fresh horses were quickly harnessed, and then while the Buraits held the Cossacks back the fugitives dashed away again, and they were soon out of sight around a bend in the winding mountain trail.

There was no sound of pursuit.

All day without a halt the fugitives sped onward, drawn by the tireless horses of the mountaineers.

The Baikal range was left behind as night fell, and the escaping ones shaped their course in the direction of Irkutsk.

"We will leave Media and yourself outside the city while Yerki and I enter it and procure the supplies we need. But first we must procure disguises," said Ivan.

"Oh, do not venture into the city," said Media. "If you should be recognized we are lost!"

"This is the favorite route for escaping exiles, and the Czar's bloodhounds are always on the alert to seize them. A reward is paid for every exile captured," said Feodor Demetri.

"I think you overrate the peril. The great yearly fair is now in progress in Irkutsk, and the city is full of strangers. There are merchants and traders from all parts of China and further north."

"Yes, and among the crowd you hope to pass unnoticed?"

"Yes, sire. But now let us seek a place where we can meet again upon the return of Yerki and myself. There is a wood which borders the frozen river. We will go there. I see smoke

curling up from among the trees, and I presume we shall find the huts of peasants where you and Media can obtain shelter, and Yerki and I the disguises we need."

With this Ivan gave the yemschick instructions to drive toward the woods, and it was soon reached. On the edge of the timber the huts of several woodsmen were discovered. The poor peasants who obtained but a scanty existence by cutting wood in the forest, and transporting it to market at Irkutsk in their rude sledges drawn by shaggy Siberian ponies, were glad of an opportunity to earn a few copecks by giving the fugitives shelter.

Ivan represented that he and his friends were traders, and that the lady was ill and could not proceed further.

Leaving his own team the boy hired a span of ponies and a wood sledge.

The woodsman at whose hut the fugitives had stopped seemed to entertain no suspicions of the truth, but this was not the fact, and much to Ivan's surprise, as he was engaged in bargaining for the use of the wood sledge and pony team, the stolid-looking Muscovite gave him the signal of the Nihilists.

This was a piece of good fortune upon which the boy courier had not counted.

"Brother, it is my wish to procure two suits of peasant's garments. One for myself and the other for my yemschick. Then we will proceed to Irkutsk with a load of your wood, sell it, and purchase our supplies, and bring them back in the sledge, which will be empty when we have disposed of the fuel."

"A good plan. You shall have the clothes of my two sons who are absent at the fair in their holiday garments. My boys' working clothes will suit you and your driver very well," replied the woodsman.

Ivan and Yerki were soon dressed in the rough garb of woodsmen, and they at once set out for Irkutsk, although the day was well nigh spent.

They entered the city boldly.

It was, as Ivan had said, crowded with strangers.

They soon sold the load of wood, and then they wandered about purchasing such articles as they needed here and there as they chanced to find them.

They were in a grain-dealer's shop purchasing supplies for the subsistence of their horses, and the woodsman's sledge, which was now well laden with their purchases, stood at the door, when two men suddenly appeared at the entrance of the shop.

"I fear we are suspected, little father," whispered Yerki to Ivan. "Do not turn about, but listen to me," he added.

"Two men whom I have noticed turn up everywhere for the last half hour, no matter whither we went, are now at the door. Ah! they are whispering together, and one of them steals away while the other remains on the watch. Come, let us hasten away. Perhaps the one who has gone away will return with the police."

Ivan whispered in reply:

"We will go at once."

Then he paid for the grain which he had been looking at, and it was loaded into the woodsman's sledge.

They drove along the crowded street as rapidly as possible, and finally turned into an obscure alley.

The spy followed them, and as Ivan glanced back at him just as the entrance of the alley was reached, he saw, with feelings of consternation, that the comrade of the spy, who had hurried away from the grain-dealer's shop, was now approaching, accompanied by half a dozen officers of the city police.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ESCAPE FROM IRKUTSK.

The yemschick pulled up his horses.

As the woodsman's ponies came to a standstill Ivan turned and called out to the spy, who was but a short distance in the rear.

"My good man!" and he added some words which he purposely mumbled in such a way that it was impossible to understand him.

"What?" answered the spy.

"I asked if——"

"What did you say?" added the spy, now coming close to the sledge.

"That we are——"

Ivan cut short what he was about to say, for at that instant

Yerki suddenly turned and dealt the spy a stunning blow upon the head with the butt of his revolver.

The spy fell senseless.

Yerki whipped up his ponies, and sent them racing along into the alley, but first the insensible spy was lifted into the sledge and covered up in the bottom of the vehicle by throwing a blanket over him.

In a moment the woodsman's sleigh wheeled into a crowded street, and yet the comrade of the spy who had become a passenger in the vehicle of our friends was not in sight.

In the crowded street which they had gained the sledge of the boy courier was soon lost among the numerous vehicles which were being driven along it.

But the spy was a cunning fellow.

He soon returned to consciousness.

"You must have hit the spy pretty hard, Yerki, that he does not show any signs of life yet," said Ivan.

"When he does I shall place my pistol at his temple to insure his silence," he added.

"Oh, oh! I thought that was your plan, my cunning fellow," said the spy, mentally, and the succeeding moment he executed a feat which he had decided upon.

With a sudden bound he leaped out of the sleigh into the midst of the crowd upon the street.

To the people about him he shouted:

"Stop that sledge! In the name of the Czar, I call upon every one to assist me! The persons in that sleigh are escaping exiles!"

The spy was in citizen's attire, and he was rather shabby at that.

"He is drunk, good people. The vodka has gone to his head," said Ivan, and Yerki drove on.

"No, no, they are exiles, I say!" shouted the police spy, and he sprang at the horses' heads to stop them, at the same time drawing a pistol.

Meanwhile, Ivan, feeling the necessity of calling secret friends to his assistance, made the sign of the Nihilists several times.

As the police spy sprang at the heads of the boy courier's horses and seized the bridle-rein, a burly Muscovite staggered against him with great force, and he was hurled aside and almost overthrown.

The next moment the spy dealt the man who had lurched against him a stinging blow in the face.

This the latter promptly resented.

He closed with the spy.

But Ivan and Yerki did not remain to witness the issue.

The moment the spy relinquished his hold upon the bridle of the horse which he had seized, Yerki drove off, slowly at first, but as the street became less obstructed he increased the speed of his horses, and presently, turning from the thronged thoroughfare, he drove at full speed toward the open country beyond the city.

"The large Russian who fell against the spy is a Nihilist; he answered the signal of the order which I gave the crowd. He assaulted the spy in order to give us an opportunity to escape," said Ivan.

They proceeded swiftly to the hut of the woodchopper.

They had just reached it, and Media and Feodor Demetri, who had appeared at the door upon their arrival, were congratulating them upon their safe return, when the heavy boom of a cannon from the walls of the fortress fell upon their ears.

"The signal gun! It will tell the people that escaping exiles are in the neighborhood!" cried the old woodchopper.

"We are in the shadows of impending doom, but we must not despair. The river is to be crossed. Forward, forward!" cried Yerki and Ivan.

Media and her father sprang into the sleigh, and it was driven swiftly away.

A strange roaring sound fell upon the ears of the little party, causing them a premonition that new peril was at hand.

"Ah, the river!" cried Ivan, as they reached the bank of the Angara.

"Horror! We cannot cross! The ice is cracking and groaning in every direction!" cried Media.

But they must cross the river.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MOUNTAIN PATROL.

"On, on! Yerki! Better death in the river than a living burial in the prison-mines," cried the boy courier, as the shouts of the pursuers from Irkutsk rang in his ears.

Yerki tightened his grasp upon the reins.

"We are in the hands of Heaven," he murmured, and the succeeding moment the sledge dashed forward upon the heaving ice.

On over the swaying ice sped the fugitives, and at length the right bank of the river was reached. The little party had been miraculously preserved. For a moment they halted on the bank and each drew a deep breath, but suddenly a booming, crashing sound burst upon their ears. The ice in the river had broken, and in a brief space of time it was a roaring, tumbling and impassable mass of rushing waves and grinding ice cakes.

"Ha! The river which threatened our doom has saved us. The bloodhounds cannot follow for some hours at least!" cried Ivan.

Yerki threw up his cap and shouted for joy.

"May the water swallow them all, say I. We shall escape, I know it!" he said.

The route of the fugitives now lay through a mountainous country.

The next night Ivan and his friends sought shelter at the hut of a peasant, and they all fell asleep because they were exhausted and nature succumbed.

Ivan was the first to start up from a sound sleep as he heard the sound of harsh voices, and the tramping of horses outside of the hovel.

Springing to a window he saw with terror that the peasant's hut was entirely surrounded by a band of Cossacks, and that every avenue of escape was guarded.

The Cossacks thronged into the hovel.

"Surrender!" cried out the leader of the Cossacks.

Resistance was useless.

Reluctantly they threw down their arms.

The boy courier and Yerki were quickly handcuffed by the Cossacks, and then the Czar's hirelings marched them out of the hut.

There they saw that the Cossacks were in command of Peter Dorkoff.

"Where is the other man, Feodor Demetri?" cried the police spy, as his men appeared with only two prisoners.

"Ah, there was another man in the party. I had forgotten that. Where can he be?" said the leader of the Cossacks.

He was none other than Media's secret friend—the brother of Mavernich, the chief of the Nihilists.

At the moment when he appeared in the peasant's hut Ivan and Yerki had recognized him, and a secret signal passed between them.

"What! Do you mean to say you forgot the most notorious of the escaping prisoners of the mines, Feodor Demetri, who plotted to murder the Czar? Back into the cabin and secure the desperate traitor on your life!" said the police spy.

The tall Cossack re-entered the hovel.

Several of his men followed him.

Presently they reappeared.

"Demetri is not there," said the tall Cossack.

"He must be; no one has left the cabin. Come, I will lead the search," said Peter Dorkoff, and he strode into the hovel.

As the spy entered it a dark form, which had crept through a door in the roof, dropped to the ground in the rear of the cabin.

Away over the snow to a dense woods a few hundred feet distant glided Feodor Demetri, for he it was who had escaped from the hut.

The boy courier was not very much surprised, therefore, when he saw Peter Dorkoff, rush out of the cabin some moments later in a state of frantic rage and exclaim:

"Demetri has escaped! We shall soon have him in our power again."

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

Everything was in readiness, and the police spy gave the order to begin the return march to Timsk.

The Cossacks were about to start, and the manacled captives were in their sleigh surrounded by their enemies, when the tall Cossack uttered a shout of surprise.

"What is it? Why do you cry out?" demanded Peter Dorkoff.

"Look yonder. A large party of mounted gendarmes are approaching from the direction of Timsk, whence we came. What can this mean?"

"I cannot imagine. We shall soon know, however, for they are rapidly nearing us."

"Yes."

"We will advance. Forward, all."

The Cossack band started.

As the two bands of men who were approaching each other drew nearer and nearer Peter Dorkoff began to betray some excitement and uneasiness.

All at once he pulled up his horse, and while his face paled, he exclaimed mentally:

"My rival. The man whom I superseded as chief of the police spies of Petrograd leads yonder band. By all the saints, I've an idea his presence bodes me no good. Fates and furies! What if my secret, which I believed to be known only to Feodor Demetri, has been discovered?"

Some moments elapsed, and then the two parties came together.

The spy of the police, whom we saw shadowing Peter Dorkoff in Petrograd, rode forward, and, drawing an official-looking document from his pocket, he said in a loud and exultant voice:

"Peter Dorkoff, resident of Petrograd, attached to the department of the secret police, I arrest you by the order of the Czar upon the charge of conspiracy to assassinate the emperor you serve."

"It is false!" cried Dorkoff, but his pale face and trembling voice belied his words.

"Seize him!" cried the leader of the gendarmes.

"Surrender in the name of the Czar!" he added.

The gendarmes surrounded Dorkoff. The Cossacks fell away from him and he was disarmed and manacled.

"This is my revenge!" hissed the man whom Dorkoff had supplanted in the favor of General Mellikoff.

Dorkoff's only answer was an imprecation.

Presently he said:

"You triumph, but the end is not yet."

"No, the end for you will be death in the prison-mines. The Czar has sentenced you for life," replied Dorkoff's enemy.

The other uttered a groan of horror.

Then the man who had arrested Dorkoff turned to Ivan and his fellow-prisoners, and said:

"You may probably be interested to know how this rascal was unmasked."

"I think I know," said Demetri.

"Then tell us. If you are Feodor Demetri, as I suspect, you must know all about the affair."

"And so I do. I chanced to be concealed in a certain house in Petrograd, when a party of noblemen, who are the secret enemies of the emperor, assembled there to plot to place another ruler on the throne by assassinating Alexander II. Peter Dorkoff was also present, and I overheard him enter into an agreement to accomplish the death of the Czar within a specified time. In return for which deed he was to receive an immense fortune and the commission of chief of the "third section" if the villain's plot was successful. Dorkoff signed a paper to the effect mentioned. It was an agreement to murder the Czar. By a wonderful chance, before the party left the house I obtained possession of that paper.

"The following day it was missed, and through the treachery of the dorvornick, or porter, of the house in which the secret meeting took place, suspicion fell upon me as the man who had obtained possession of the terrible document.

"From that moment I was a marked man. Fear inspired Peter Dorkoff to hunt me down.

"Evidence that I was a Nihilist was found and I was doomed to exile and the prison-mines.

"Then Dorkoff came to me in the prison at Petrograd and offered to set me free and secure a pardon for me if I would surrender the agreement which branded him as a traitor to the Czar and a would-be assassin, and take an oath to keep the secret I had accidentally discovered.

"It was out of my power to do this even if I had desired to, for the document which Dorkoff wanted had passed out of my possession.

"On the morning following the night when it came into my possession I gave the paper to the son of a man who had once saved my life to be used to save his brother from death.

"The man whom I wished to save had been sent to the mines. There his health failed and we knew his life could only be saved by securing his pardon.

"But the day my friend received the paper which he was to make the price of his brother's life he disappeared, and to my knowledge he has never been heard of since. His friends believed he had secretly been assassinated because he had a large sum of money on his person the day he was missing.

"The same day that my friend disappeared with the agreement of the traitors signed by Dorkoff, I was arrested.

"When Dorkoff came to me in prison I assured him that I would not and could not comply with the terms he offered me, and I acknowledged that the fatal paper was no longer in my keeping.

"Whether he believed me or not I cannot say. I know, however, that he vowed death should forever seal my lips against the revelation of his secret.

"To that end he produced the false testimony which convinced the Czar that I plotted to murder him, and caused him to doom me to death.

"I knew that any accusation of mine, unsupported by positive proof by means of such documentary evidence as had passed out of my hands, would not be credited, and so I did not attempt to reveal the plot which I had discovered."

Thus explained Demetri.

The police spy who had arrested Dorkoff now said:

"My suspicions were aroused by Dorkoff's peculiar and absorbing personal interests in bringing about your doom. As I owed him a debt of vengeance I set about watching him, and in one way and another which I need not dwell upon, I became convinced that fear of you was the cause of his desire to accomplish your death. Working upon that theory, I traced Dorkoff to the house of a nobleman who was suspected of being a secret enemy of the Czar. From a conversation there overheard I gathered that there was evidence in a certain paper which you had given to a man whose name was mentioned, which, if made public, would ruin Dorkoff. I next set out to find the man who had that paper. Then I found that he had mysteriously disappeared, but I determined to find out what had become of him. Aided by some of the shrewdest trackers in Petrograd I found my man. But he was dead and his body was in the cellar of a deserted building in the worst part of Petrograd. The poor fellow had been murdered by thieves, who had taken his gold, but the agreement to murder the Czar which Dorkoff signed was found upon his person, sewed up in the lining of his coat.

"When the document was mine I placed it before the Czar and explained that you, Feodor Demetri, were the victim of Dorkoff's fears.

"Upon this showing I was ordered to Siberia to arrest Dorkoff and imprison him for life in the mines.

"I also have good news for you. The Czar has granted you pardon upon condition that you agree to name the nobles engaged in the conspiracy with Dorkoff. Will you do this?"

"Yes, for I have no sympathy with murderers, even though their intended victim be the Czar," replied Demetri.

"Well spoken. You are free!" said the police agent.

Ivan and Yerki uttered shouts of joy, and Media shed tears of happiness.

The fetters were stricken from Demetri's wrists and his daughter was enfolded in his embrace.

Who can depict the joy of the exiles as they heard this?

We leave all that to the imagination of the readers.

And now in conclusion we have little to add.

Dorkoff was consigned to the mines.

Ivan and his friends returned to Petrograd, but before they reached the Russian capital the great tragedy of March 13th, 1881, was enacted, and Alexander II. was slain by a bursting bomb hurled by a Nihilist.

As Demetri had feared, Mavernich had led his followers on to commit a crime of which no right-thinking person can approve.

The exiles were warmly welcomed by their friends, and little Michael, Media's lame brother, was happy once more with his father and his sister.

Yavod, the courier, whom Ivan had wounded in the duel at Count Ammernich's palace, recovered, and he and Ivan subsequently became good friends.

Ivan was promoted by the successor of Alexander II. to the position of chief of couriers, and Yerki was appointed his yemshick in chief.

Media and the boy courier became man and wife some years later, and as more peaceful times ensued, the Nihilists became less active, and nothing occurred to mar the happiness of our friends.

Next week's issue will contain "THE SECRET OF PAGE 99; OR, AN OLD BOOK COVER." By Allyn Draper.

SEND POSTAL FOR OUR FREE CATALOGUE.

CURRENT NEWS

Deer Island light, Boston, one of the harbor aids to navigation, failed the other night, and investigation resulted in the finding of the body of the keeper, Joseph R. McCabe, on a sandbar which juts from the island to the light. It is supposed that seas kicked up by a 70-mile gale overwhelmed McCabe as he was trying to walk across the bar. He was to have been married on Easter Sunday.

Platinum has recently been discovered in the mountains about Ronda, in Southern Spain, between Algeciras and Gibraltar. The Spanish Government has taken possession of the ground on which the discovery has been made, and has arranged for developing the mine under the direction of the Geological Institute. An appropriation of \$29,000 a year will be made for the necessary drilling, machinery and other expenses.

Cincinnati police are endeavoring to learn the identity of a young woman twenty-four years old whose strange actions within the last few years have puzzled alienists and physicians. She gives her name as Francis Frey, and says she was born in Columbus twenty-four years ago. When arrested she was employed as a waiter in a restaurant. She was taken to the police station, where she confessed to the police that she had played the role of a man for several years.

The post lighthouse keeper often descended from father to daughter. In the old days the only requirement for the position was faithfulness to duty. Under the new regulations in the United States the applicant for such a position must be a male citizen. Three women are still on the Government payrolls as lighthouse keepers, and will be allowed to remain in their positions as long as they are willing and able to do the work. At Angel Island one of these women has surrounded her lighthouse with a beautiful garden of vines and flowers.

"I pulled him off a wagon and said, 'Let's go and get married?'" declared Mrs. Lizzie B. McNeece, of Fort Worth, Texas, as she signed an affidavit in the office of County Clerk Logan that she had proposed to Sidney Johnson. "He's here," she continued, and pointed with her thumb to Johnson. Logan had offered a free marriage license to the first Tarrant County woman who would make an affidavit she had proposed. Johnson and Mrs. McNeece were married by Justice Emmett Moore immediately after the license was issued.

The story of a \$10,000 joke on Lawrence College, Wisconsin, became known recently when Alice Miller, admitted at Antigo she had no such money as she was credited with offering to give the college. Two months ago she went to Lawrence College and promised \$10,000 for a new dormitory to be named for her on condition the college raised \$8,000 in addition. When the banks refused

to accept her checks on the strength of this offer, she was financed on her way to Ashland by Dr. John Vaughan, fiscal agent of the school. Meanwhile she was dined by the college authorities.

Attorney J. L. Holmes announced that the United States now has a gun with a range of twenty-four miles which throws a projectile with sufficient velocity to penetrate any armor plate so far manufactured. This information, Mr. Holmes announced, he had received from officials of the Midland Crucible Steel Company at Midland, Pa., following a test of a plate made at the United States testing grounds at Sandy Hook a short time ago. The plate in question was twenty-two feet long, nine feet high and eighteen inches in thickness. Plates manufactured under the same process which have been previously tested had withstood every attempt to penetrate them with modern high velocity projectiles.

The busy silkworms of Japan are to find a chemical-mechanical rival. At Yonezawa a big filature outfit was lately secured by the Adzuma Leather Manufacturing Company for the purpose of inaugurating the manufacture of artificial silk. This is the first attempt in the industry in Japan. In compliance with the request of the company professors in the Yonezawa Polytechnic Institute have been engaged for some time past in the perfection of the process of manufacturing the goods and a patent has been taken out for the result obtained quite recently. The perfection, or rather invention, of the manufacturing process has been arrived at quite independently of the German invention and is reported to show a great improvement on the foreign method.

The ground on which the city of New York now stands was once a favorite trapping ground for the ancestors of our present-day millionaires. A Dutch West Indian company which bought and trapped furs formed the basis of colonization of New York State. The early history of the fur industry can be read in Marco Polo's travels, the politics of Russia, the French occupation of Canada and the operations of the Hudson Bay Company. During the eighteenth century men carried fur muffs and Napoleon himself designed many of the fur garments worn during his reign. Margaret, Queen of Navarre, is supposed to be the first woman to wear a fur boa. Fur caps, collars and cuffs for men were worn in the reign of Louis XI. In 1859 fur first appeared as a badge of royalty when at the entrance of Isabella of Bavaria into Paris. Valentine, Duchess of Orleans, wore a coat of ermine. Most of the royalties exacted by Napoleon from the northern tribes of Europe were paid in furs. About the time Columbus discovered America fur mantles and separate fur sleeves, tied at the top with ribbon, were features of the fashion. Until the discovery of America this great industry exerted a powerful influence on the history of the country.

BOWERY BEN

— OR —

THE BOY WITHOUT A NAME

BY J. P. RICHARDS

(A Serial Story)

CHAPTER XIII (continued)

"What's the number?"

"Dere it is," and the boy handed Stapleton a card.

"Very well, there's your dollar."

The line had now begun to move, and the boy was not far from the box office.

"T'anks. Youse is a man o' yer word, youse is."

"One moment," said Stapleton, keeping alongside his spy; "I may want you to-morrow on another job. Meet me on the upper side of the square to-morrow at noon. It'll be worth a fiver to you."

"All right, boss."

The boy was now inside the door, near the gallery ticket office, and in the full light, and Stapleton dropped back in the shadow and presently saw him go racing up the stairs, ticket in hand.

"I can trust him if I pay him," he muttered, "and he won't ask questions. He's just the sort I want. Having located the child, fortunately, all I have now to do is to get Ben out of the way and the rest is easy."

He had gone in disguise that afternoon to the house of Mrs. Merchant, whom he knew very well, and had seen Lizzie, accompanied by a maid, go for a drive in the park and return an hour later.

"The boy was right," he mused, "but how it happened, I don't know, unless the hag told him. I shall have to settle with her next, the treacherous viper."

On Sunday afternoon Ben went up to Mrs. Merchant's to see Lizzie, and to report the disappearance of Granny Green and his meeting with Stapleton.

He was sitting in the library talking to Mrs. Merchant with Lizzie on his knee when the footman entered with a note and said:

"There is a messenger boy in the hall, ma'am. He says he will take the young lady, and the maid can go along to bring her back."

"Take the child?" asked Mrs. Merchant. "Where?"

"To see a boy who has been hurt, ma'am," he says, "and who wants to see the young lady very much."

"But I don't understand. What boy is it? Did you and Lizzie have any friends, Ben?"

"Better read the note, ma'am," said Ben, with a sudden suspicion.

Mrs. Merchant opened the note and read as follows:

"Dear Sis—I was knocked down by a carriage this morning while coming to see you, and I am badly hurt. Please come and see me as soon as you can. You can come with the messenger boy.

BEN."

"It's a put-up job," said Ben. "The old woman or Stapleton are at the bottom of it. I saw him yesterday and I let out that sis was here. I'll fix him. Tell the boy to step in, James."

"What's your plan, Ben?" asked Mrs. Merchant, as the boy set the child down.

"To make him tell who sent him. Maybe he knows and maybe he don't, but I'll find out. Show him in, James, and keep dark—don't say anything, I mean."

The footman went out and presently returned with a boy in a messenger's uniform, which did not seem to set well upon him, as though it were new or he were unaccustomed to it.

As he entered he suddenly caught sight of Ben, who had arisen, and a look of surprise arose upon his not over-intelligent and not at all prepossessing face.

He uttered a frightened exclamation, and turned to retreat, but the footman stood in front of the closed door and stopped him.

"Gee! how did yer git away?" he asked Ben. "I tought dey woiked de trick, all right."

"Worked what trick all right?"

"Sendin' de carriage fur yer to yer house in Forty-fourth street."

"I don't live on Forty-fourth street."

"But I seen yer go dere las' night. It's near Madison avenyer."

Ben sprang forward, seized the boy by the throat, shook him and demanded:

"So, you've been set to spy on me, eh? What was I to be sent for about? What was the game?"

"Ter come an' see de kid who was took sick sudden. Dey was ter have a swell coachman an' everyting. He said he'd get yer all right, an' den I come up here ter get de kid. Lemme go, an' I'll blow de hull business."

"They've got Arthur, 'stead o' me," cried Ben. "It's Stapleton's doings. Where was I to be taken? If you don't tell me, I'll smash you so's your mother wouldn't know you from a bundle o' rags."

CHAPTER XIV.

ARTHUR A PRISONER.

The pretended messenger boy had been so astonished in the first place at seeing Ben that he lost all his cunning, and was now so frightened by the young fellow's sudden assault that he made no resistance, but trembled so violently that Ben literally held him up against the door.

"You're a fake messenger," said Ben. "Where's your number and your book? You're a snide, you are. Who's been puttin' you up to it? Tell me or I'll have you run in this minute. You got a police call in the house, ma'am?"

"I dunno who he is," stammered the spy. "He got me ter foller yer yes'day ter see where yer worked an' then I follered yer home ter see where yer lived. I see yer go in de big house on Forty-fourth street, an' I told him dat was de place. Den yer was ter be kidnaped to-day an' de snide coachman told me he done it, an' I come here, bein' all ready."

"Who sent you?"

"I dunno, I told yer. He didn't gimme his card nor nothin', so I dunno."

(To be continued)

INTERESTING TOPICS

Regular steamship service is to be established between Japan and the islands of the Caroline group, which formerly belonged to the Germans, and were seized by the Japanese early in the war. A monthly service will be maintained from Yokohama to Truk Island, from which point two subsidiary lines will be operated.

Shepherd Linscott, son of F. W. Linscott, a farmer near Farmington, Kan., had a narrow escape from burning to death when fire destroyed the Linscott home early one morning. Young Linscott slept so soundly that the fact that his bed was on fire didn't waken him. Indeed, when he was aroused by an elder brother, his nightgown was on fire, but the boy was not burned.

The richest ruler in the world is the Czar of Russia. He has the Romanoff private estate, yielding about two millions a year. Beyond that his allowance amounts to another two millions. There are small expenses to be deducted, such as two million, five hundred thousand dollars a year to Grand Dukes and Duchesses. But when everything has been taken into account the Czar remains far richer than any of the other old world potentates.

Shortly after leaving a skating party on Hooley's Pond, North Plainfield, N. J., William White, of Rock View Terrace, was found dead on the sidewalk within two blocks of his home. A physician said heart disease killed him. Just a year ago the young man's father, George F. White, was found dead in the railway station at Plainfield. Young White had been the life of the skating party. The violent exertion of skating had proved too much for his heart.

The following dispatch from Wheeling, W. Va., was printed in the San Francisco Call: Old fields containing worthless rotting stumps have been suddenly enhanced in value in Wetzel County. They are bringing from 50 cents to \$1 each. Those who purchase \$1 stumps find a quart bottle of whisky underneath and those who buy half dollar stumps find a pint bottle beneath. Those engaged in the traffic say they are not selling liquor, merely the stumps. At any rate, there has not been a single arrest.

Judge Irwin, of Sauk County, Wis., was one day holding court in Prairie du Sac, years ago, when the door of the judicial chamber was rudely flung open and an excited voice cried, "Bear in the village!" Without the formality of an adjournment, the judge, jury, complainant and prisoner, in hilarious tumult, abandoned the august presence of the law. The entire village joined in the chase. Soon Brother Bruin was merrily roasting on a spit, while the court, in good humor, resumed its business where it had left off.

Benjamin Alfend, 18 years old, has the best newspaper stand in St. Louis, Mo., at the south entrance of the Rail-

way Exchange building. His brother, Max, two years younger, has nearly as good a stand, at the north end of the same building. Two of their brothers, Samuel and Morgan, have a stand in another part of the business district, where Benjamin began in the business of selling papers. A fifth brother, Reuben, is attending the State School of Mines.

An overcoat saved the life of Glen Bowers, a high school boy of Mount Pleasant, Pa., who was skating near the Bridgeport dam. Glen broke through the ice. His companions were unable to reach him. Each time he came to the surface he would grasp the ice, but each time it gave way. Finally, benumbed, he was unable to use his hands, and when his companions, after forming a human chain on the brittle ice, threw the end of a long overcoat to him, he got it between his teeth and held on until he was pulled to stronger ice and safety.

A rare old violin, valued at \$700 and owned by Miss Marian Beecher, of Puyallup, Wash., was all that was saved when the little house adjoining the home of John S. Ellegood on South Hill burned to the ground. As Miss Beecher opened the door to enter her room she was met by a cloud of smoke. Her first thought was of the old violin stored in a small iron trunk which had been given to her by her father and which was prized as an heirloom of the family. Rushing into the smoke, she grabbed the trunk, but found it was too heavy to drag out. She lifted the lid, however, lifted out the violin and carried it to safety.

This is a true story that reads like one of pioneer days. It happened during the last big blizzard in Wisconsin, the worst of the winter. The 14-year-old son of Edward Ellingson, a farmer living near Birch Lake, was suddenly taken ill. The boy's condition became so serious that the father telephoned to a hospital in the town of Ashland and was advised that his son probably had acute appendicitis and should be hurried to the hospital. Mr. Ellingson placed the boy on a horse, the roads being in such bad shape that a team could not get through, and started out in the blizzard on a timber road which is poor even in summer. The boy became so sick that he had to be strapped to the animal's back. The horse floundered through the snowdrifts and Mr. Ellingson followed, hanging on the animal's tail, trusting to its instinct to keep to the road. They finally arrived at a railroad track, where the man piled some boards, built a fire and turned the horse loose. The first train which passed was going in the wrong direction, but Mr. Ellingson flagged it, went to the town of Iron River, then took an eastbound train, changed cars at Ripon and arrived at Ashland, where the boy was taken to the hospital and surgeons immediately performed the operation that was necessary to save his life.

FROM ALL POINTS

In order to release for military service many of the men now engaged in the electrical industry, the Electric Contractors' Association of Liverpool, England, has decided to train a number of women in electrical work.

Shoe leather has become so scarce in Austria that the shoemakers demand \$2 for soleing an old pair of shoes. Hundreds of children are unable to go to school because they have no shoes, which cost anywhere from \$2 to \$5 a pair. Shoes with wooden soles have been introduced from Germany, but even these cost from \$1.20 to \$2 a pair.

The United States sent more motor car to India during the six months' period ended in September, 1915, than did Great Britain. According to the report of the Department of Statistics for India, just published, the number of cars imported into India from the United States was 620, while those shipped from Great Britain amounted to 420.

Queenie B., a white hen owned by T. H. Buckingham, of St. Joseph, Mo., established what is believed to be a new world's record in egg-laying recently when she laid two eggs within an hour. The record was made at the Buchanan County Poultry Show. One of the eggs has a shell that is a trifle soft, but both are of normal size. The hen has a record of more than 200 eggs a year. Queenie B. is a little over a year old.

There are 176,701 Japanese in United States territory, of whom 90,808 are in Hawaii. There are over 90,000 Japanese in Mexico. The Japanese Foreign Office has recently published tables showing the number and professions of the Japanese residing in foreign countries. According to the figures, the Japanese residing in foreign countries at the end of last June numbered 359,716, of whom 240,423 were males and the remaining 179,393 were females. As compared with the corresponding period of the preceding year, an increase of 38,454 is shown.

The last year was the most prosperous in the history of the general fisheries of Alaska, according to the recent report of William C. Redfield, the Secretary of Commerce. The products were valued at \$5,500,000 more than those of the previous season. The salmon catch was the largest ever made, the report states. The fisheries give employment to 21,200 people and represent an investment of \$37,000,000. More than 4,000,000 cases of canned salmon, valued at \$18,920,000, were exported from the country, it is declared. The value of the other kinds of fish caught is placed at about \$200,000.

The Apache Trail is a new route in the Southwest which will open up some hitherto impenetrable country, but its main feature is that it provides a highway that reaches

the Roosevelt Dam, the Government project which holds back the largest artificial lake in the world. For nearly five years 2,000 men were employed in achieving this engineering feat, and as a result nearly 250,000 acres are to be irrigated. This impounded water has transformed the arid basin lying westward from Salt River and Tonto Creek into one of the most productive regions of the Southwest. The trail extends from Globe, Ariz., to Phoenix, a distance of 120 miles.

According to an announcement made by the United States Bureau of Navigation, it is learned that a powerful radio station has been built on Tahiti, one of the Society Island group, by the French Government. The temporary station is of 10 kw. capacity, and will be used until the permanent station is completed. The latter will have an aerial system supported by eight towers, each 325 feet high, placed in two parallel rows of four towers each. Two antennae will be provided for two different wave lengths. It is expected that the permanent installation will be capable of working with Sydney, South America, Honolulu, San Francisco, Cochin-China, and even Martinique and Guadeloupe. On January 5th the temporary station on Tahiti was heard at San Francisco.

Eighteen years ago David Moylan was a railway switchman. To-day he is a Municipal Court judge in Cleveland, Ohio. In the interval Judge Moylan lost both his arms in accidents. Thus disabled for railroad work, he first taught himself to write by holding his pen between his teeth. Then he studied law, was admitted to the bar, and four years ago was elected to the county council. His elevation to the bench is a recent recognition of his ability. Judge Moylan is a remarkable evidence of what courage and persistence can achieve in the face of hardest handicaps. His career is only beginning. Any one with the combination of brain and spirit capable of overcoming such difficulties may go far on the road to distinction if his life is spared.

A dog's appearance at a bank paying teller's window seeking payment of his year's savings fund check is a new wrinkle. Kiddo, the prize winning fox terrier of Dr. J. H. Hagenbuch, of Mahanoy City, Pa., with check in mouth and indorsed by himself, was the lucky canine. A year ago Cashier W. H. Kohler, of the Union National Bank, jokingly asked the doctor why he didn't take out a savings account for his dog. "I will," the doctor replied. It became due, and amounted to \$25.50, and the cashier sent out the check to Kiddo Hagenbuch, in care of his "pa." The fox terrier was soon at the window. The check had been indorsed "Kiddo Hagenbuch, in care of his 'pa.'" Opposite the signature appeared a mark of the dog's paw, the cashier having pushed an ink pad against it. The money was promptly paid, and the dog pranced away with his envelope carrying the amount.

"A. J." FROM JAYVILLE

—OR—

THE BOY WHO WAS LOST IN THE BOWERY

By William Wade

(A Serial Story)

CHAPTER XVI (continued)

Arriving at the bank, he was informed that Mr. Montgomery had gone over to Boston the night before, and would not be back until Saturday.

This cut off all chance of private communication with him, and the boys went directly to the clubroom to talk matters over.

Here they came to the conclusion to follow out Fred Filly's instructions, and attend to the matter themselves.

And so it came about that each of these three boys, armed with revolvers, turned up in the automobile at Mr. Montgomery's magnificent country seat, Longview-on-Hudson, at about eight o'clock that evening.

As they rolled up the broad avenue they perceived that the house was practically dark.

"It looks as though there was nobody at home," remarked Charlie. "I'm blest if I know what we are going to do if that proves to be the case, for under those circumstances I don't know what excuse we can possibly make for tying up here for the night."

The boys were received by the butler, who knew them all as friends of his "young master," for they had been entertained at Longview many times.

Inquiring for Mrs. Montgomery, they were informed that she was in Boston with her husband.

"Master Matt" was not at home, but was expected.

"Miss Mabel" was at home, and the boys sent up their cards and were received by a very charming young lady, to whom Charlie Fitch had at one time been quite attentive, although of late a German "Prince," who possessed little more than the clothes he owed his tailor for, had rather cut him out.

Miss Mabel was exceedingly gracious, however, and made matters very easy for her unexpected guests.

In the absence of her mother she took it upon herself to invite her brother's friends to remain until morning.

The auto was put away, the housekeeper was notified, and all was plain sailing.

Charlie and his friends passed a delightful evening.

The boys had now entered fully upon the spirit of the thing, and Charlie was glad that he had not seen Mr. Montgomery.

At ten o'clock Matt arrived, having come up from New York by train.

As he entered the parlor all saw that he was very much under the influence of liquor.

In fact, he could scarcely hold himself together.

Ignoring his sister's presence, he stopped in the doorway, and in a loud, boisterous way demanded of Charlie Fitch what brought him there, remarking that he had a "deuce of a cheek" to come to his house under the circumstances, and saying other unpleasant things.

Mabel at once arose, excused herself, and left the room. Now came the trying part of it.

Matt dropped into a chair and burst out into a torrent of abuse.

"You get out of here, Charlie Fitch!" he cried. "You insulted my friend Carter last night, and you insulted me. You robbed him and you know you did. Only that he urged me not to make the matter public and get it into the papers I should have had a warrant out for your arrest by this time. The idea of you three fellers calling here and tying up for the night! Get out of here! Get out right now!"

It was time for Charlie to do the detective act, and show a little diplomacy, and he went right at it.

"Come, come, Monty," he said, "you are making a big mistake. We never blamed you. As for your friend Carter, the sooner you cut him out the better. The jay proved his words. He showed that fellow up for what he was, surest thing."

"I say he didn't," retorted Matt stubbornly.

If he had been less under the influence there might have been serious trouble, but the fact was Matt was almost too drunk to move.

"Of course he did," said Tom. "How about the wig?"

"I don't care nothing about the wig," muttered Matt, getting sleepy. "I guess Jack Carter has a right to wear one if he chooses. It isn't any business of yours."

"Be reasonable, Monty," said Will Potter. "Where did you pick the fellow up, anyway?"

"None of your business."

"I suppose it wasn't in some gambling house, of course?"

"None of your business," growled Matt, sleepier than ever. "Are you fellows going to get out, or not?"

"Oh, yes, we'll get out," said Charlie. "But you cut it out, Matt. Come, shake and let's be friends."

"No, I won't neither. You have insulted me and insulted my friend. I want you to get out of the house."

"So we will."

"When?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Who asked you to stop here all night?"

"Your sister did, in your mother's name. Because you have seen fit to play the fool, I can't see that it is any reason for me to cut a family I think as much of as I do of yours."

Matt made an effort to brace up.

He stared at Charlie long, but certainly not as fixedly as he no doubt thought he was doing.

"All right," he said, staggering to his feet. "If you are the sort to come sucking around where you aren't wanted, I don't know as I can help it."

With that he staggered out of the room, running into the door jamb, and was gone.

"What's his game now?" whispered Tom Roden.

"I don't believe he has got any," replied Will. "He is too drunk to know what he is about."

"I don't know about that," replied Charlie. "I've seen Monty full before, many a time. He always knows what he is about, and don't you forget it. I didn't like the way he looked at me. I am beginning to wonder if there is anything in what Fred Filly said."

(To be continued)

A FEW GOOD ITEMS

ENORMOUS EDIFICE BUILT OF STONES.

G. W. Monkhill, graduate of McGill University, Montreal, who accompanied the Yale and Geographical Society expeditions on their search for Aztec ruins in the Andes, returned aboard the United States steamship Santa Marta.

He declared the archaeologists discovered what appeared to be evidence of a pre-Aztec civilization, which flourished about the eighth century. An enormous edifice, apparently a fortification, formed of stones weighing thirty and forty tons each, was discovered near Ollantaylamba, forty-five miles from Cuzco, Peru. In the opinion of Mr. Monkhill, the work is more remarkable than the construction of the pyramids, for the stones had been transferred from a quarry across the river and up a steep mountainside.

"The only theory advanced as to the method used by the natives to move the stones," said Mr. Monkhill, "is that the river was dammed, the stone advanced to the middle, then a second dam constructed behind the stone and including the second half of the river, the first obstruction meantime being destroyed."

IS THE THOMAS EDISON OF WEST VIRGINIA.

Frank Solipa, an Italian, who was arrested at Huntington some time ago on a charge of violating the Yost law, is the Thomas Edison of West Virginia. His is a great mind. You gotta hand it to Frankie!

Until West Virginia went "dry" Mr. Solipa, like hundreds of others, was not an inventor. But when he was hauled in by Deputy Prohibition Commissioner Al H. Curry, according to the Huntington Dispatch, Frank was guarding three gallons of pure alcohol.

Furthermore, says the Dispatch:

"From the three gallons of pure alcohol which Solipa had at least twenty gallons of booze could be made, said Commissioner Curry. It is this new phase of violation of the Yost law which the Blue detectives are now closely watching, Mr. Curry declared. He stated that persons will bring a comparatively small quantity of pure alcohol into the State, mix it with chemicals, and color it to look like whisky before placing it on sale.

"Besides the pure alcohol, Solipa had also a quart of whisky and a quart of wine, according to Mr. Curry. Solipa pleaded guilty before Magistrate Stuart and was sentenced to pay a fine of \$100 and to sixty days in jail. Solipa was taken off of the Guyan-Valley train en route to Logan County. His age was given as twenty years."

A POWERFUL MAGNET.

One of the most powerful magnets in the world has been installed for the assistance of surgeons in the relief department of one of the largest Pittsburgh manufacturing plants.

The magnet is mounted on a box containing the resister, which is used to regulate the amount of current flowing through the coils. It requires 4,000 watts for its operation, or enough power to supply one hundred lamps of

thirty-two candle-power each, and is designed for operation on seventy volts.

It is not an infrequent occurrence for steel and iron workers to get bits of metal in their eyes or hands. Previous to the installation of a magnet the only means of removal was by probing, a method which is as certain as it is painful. Since this machine was put in operation it is a very simple proceeding to extract such particles.

The portion of the body in which the foreign particle is embedded is placed near the pole tip of the magnet, the switch is closed, and the magnet does the rest. Some remarkably small pieces have been extracted in this way. The pole piece is removable, a number of different shapes being supplied for various classes of work.

A new method of using coal in competition with oil fuel has been tried at Vancouver, British Columbia. Those conducting the experiments say that crushed coal can be supplied to steam-producing furnaces by the same method in use for oil. The new process is particularly interesting to British Columbia, as it is proposed to apply it for smelting in the big mining plants there. It is said that seven tons of copper ore can be smelted with one ton of coal by the new process, whereas formerly the ratio was one ton of coal to one ton of ore.

ESCAPED BY STRATEGY.

One of the most adventurous records of escape from hostile territory so far chronicled in the war is that of a French officer who was made prisoner by the Germans shortly after the battle of Charleroi in August, 1914. He made his way out of Belgium, where he was held, via Holland and England, and eventually regained his own country.

After capturing a German battery with his company south of Charleroi, he was left unconscious near the enemy's lines and posted as "dead on the field of honor." He was carried back, however, by a German ambulance and after two months in the hospital recovered from his wounds.

A French girl who attended him promised to assist. She brought him old clothes and assisted him in forging a German pass. Disguised as a tramp he slipped out of the hospital one night and started through the villages of northern France, his counterfeit pass carrying him past the sentries.

The dangerous stage was in crossing the Belgian frontier to Holland. This he effected through an agent who made a business of helping young Belgians over. He was instructed to walk at night to a milestone where a man with a red muffler would be sitting on a heap of stones. As he passed the man, he was to say "Belgica," and keep on. He followed his instructions, the man rose and overtook him with a low "Follow me," and after a walk in silence announced "Holland." Then he disappeared.

From there to England and thence to France was easy.

ITEMS OF GENERAL INTEREST

CHAMPION FLY CATCHER.

Redlands, a town in California, established the office of municipal fly catcher a year ago, and appointed a man to fill it. That official acts on a single observed fact—that flies instinctively fly upward and toward light. He constructed a large trap—a screened frame, twelve inches square, and more than two feet in height. He raised this two inches from the ground and attached to the bottom a cone-shaped screen, with the large end down. Under the cone he put a banana skin. He nailed the contrivance to a post on a street corner and the flies did the rest.

In the first month, says Youth's Companion, from the one hundred traps that he scattered through the business section of Redlands, the official fly catcher had emptied and burned fifty gallons of flies. That means not far from four million flies.

There are now five hundred of the fly traps in Redlands, and, according to the residents, all the flies in Redlands were in them last summer.

STAR LARGER THAN THE SUN.

In the solar system, of which this little earth is a part, most of us are accustomed to look upon the sun as the king of heavenly bodies. But even with his diameter of 860,000 miles, which is a good deal larger than the scant 8,000-mile diameter of our earth, he is nevertheless a pigmy when compared to some of the fixed stars, which are, of course, suns themselves, glowing with their own heat. There are many of these fixed stars, says Popular Science Monthly, which astronomers have estimated to be larger than our sun, and of these, one of the most imposing is the star Canopus.

This star of the first magnitude has a diameter 134 times greater, an area 18,000 times larger, and a volume two and one-half million times vaster than the emperor of our own skies. Truly, Canopus makes a dwarf of the sun; yet his brilliancy, which is thrice that of the sun, is discernible only as a bright star on account of his almost immeasurable distance from the earth.

TEN MILLION BULBS.

In a paper on "Electric Bulbs for Automobiles," by Henry Schroeder, of the Society of Automobile Engineers, is the following:

The total number of bulbs used in the United States for automobile lighting during 1915 is estimated at about ten millions. Information received from eighty-five car manufacturers regarding their 1916 model cars indicates the following:

Bulbs for three-cell systems are increasing in favor, for six-cell systems decreasing in favor, and for nine-cell systems remaining about constant. The single-contact base is gaining and the double-contact losing in favor. About three-quarters of the bulbs used for three-cell systems are fitted with single-contact base, and this amount is increasing. Of the bulbs used for six-cell systems up to the

present time little less than one-half of them are fitted with the single-contact base. It is indicated that in 1916 nearly three-quarters of them will be so fitted. Practically all of the bulbs used for nine-cell systems have been and will be fitted with the double-contact base.

BOY TREED BY BEAR.

Robert Collins, 15 years old, lives in the village of Hilliard, Ky. He has been in the habit of going out into the woods hunting for small game. The other day he was looking for squirrels and he went around the top of a hill about three miles from town. There he met a big black bear.

Robert had always heard of shooting a bear behind the left foreleg so as to get to the heart, so he fired in that direction. But the bear charged and the boy had to run quite a distance. At last he came to a small tree, the bear close on his trail. Robert climbed the tree and fired his three remaining shells at the bear. He succeeded in wounding the big animal, but could not tell how seriously, as the bear remained close to the tree and showed no inclination of dying.

Robert stayed up in the tree all night. He was found early the next morning by searchers. The bear was still there, but nearly dead from loss of blood. The boy says he will wait a couple of years before going where he is likely to encounter another bear, but the people of Hilliard say he made his escape as well as most men would have done.

8 FEET AND 29 INCHES TALL.

Two of the greatest friends in the world, in spite of the fact that one feels much above the other and does not hesitate to say so, arrived on the Espagne recently from Bordeaux. Baptiste Ugo and Esmiliare Adrian were the pair and their fellow passengers in the second cabin had laughingly nicknamed them "the long and short of it," for Baptiste is an even eight feet tall and broad in proportion, while little Esmiliare is a dwarf only twenty-nine inches in height. The pair are the latest acquisitions to Ringling Brothers' Circus. The giant is forty-three years old and the dwarf thirty-eight.

Although it was at first feared that Baptiste, through the use of two cabins, would prove an expensive passenger to carry, inasmuch as it was necessary to cut a hole through the partition so that his feet might find comfortable lodging in the berth of the adjoining cabin, Esmiliare, with characteristic French thrift, volunteered to help keep the circus on a firm financial footing by sharing the scant remaining portion of the berth left by Baptiste's feet. Both, being seasoned travelers, enjoyed the trip. Both regret their inability to join the colors, as modern trench warfare has eliminated them. Baptiste finds difficulty in keeping his head and shoulders under cover, while Esmiliare discovered an insurmountable handicap in the mud at the bottom of the trenches.

PLUCK AND LUCK

NEW YORK, MARCH 15, 1916.

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GOOD CURRENT NEWS ARTICLES

Henry Bake, of Harrisburg, Pa., has been arrested by State Policeman Curtis A. Davies on charges of burglary. He confessed to a string of thefts covering months in the fashionable suburban districts of the State capital. In Bake's pocket was found a much-used Bible. Circled with red ink was the quotation "Seek and ye shall find."

Mrs. Mary Haberman, of Portland, Ore., who stormed the courts with a battery of nine lawyers, is victor in her suit against John Hart, who was defended by only two legal guns. As a result Hart must return to Mrs. Haberman one old hen and eleven small chickens or else pay \$10 in cash for them. Thus will justice be done according to the decision of District Judge Bell. Mrs. Haberman sued for \$22.

The war has evidently had a marked effect in reducing hunting in Alsace-Lorraine, as appears from a recent decree of the Strassburg authorities. Wild hogs have increased in some parts of the country to such an extent that the Government has given to the local authorities the right to order the hunting of the animals at frequent intervals during the winter months. This applies to cases where the owners of hunting rights fail to shoot off the increase of the hogs and the latter commit ravages upon the crops.

Plans are under way for a British Empire fair to be held next year, which, it is expected, will be the largest of its kind ever held in the world. The time set for it is the spring of 1917, and the place selected is Willesden Green, London. The intention is to provide accommodation for exhibits of practically every known industry. The exhibition building will cost about \$1,000,000 and cover an area of 610,000 square feet. The frontage of the stalls will be about twelve miles in length, and arrangements will be made for possible enlargement of the grounds should this be required. The fair will be held for three weeks.

The trench warfare in France has been responsible for some remarkable horrors. There have been plagues of bloated flies which are produced in millions by a few hours of sunshine. In some districts, too, there have been

plagues of voles, due no doubt to the non-cultivation of the fields, which fall into the trenches by scores, are trampled under foot by the men, and are then devoured by dreadful beetles. To these plagues has now succeeded one of giant rats, some having been measured as nearly two feet in length from tip of nose to end of tail and of a girth which is proportional. To combat these, ferrets are now being sent out in hundreds from England, with the result that the price of ferrets has considerably risen everywhere, while in some places they are not procurable at all. The men consider it great sport, and a bag of over 400 rats has been made in an afternoon. The cold in the trenches has not been so great this winter as that which was encountered last year, and if it should come later, the troops are probably better prepared to meet it; but the wet and mud have been terrible, the rain especially being heavy and constant.

GRINS AND CHUCKLES

"Can you keep a secret, uncle?" "Yes." "Well, auntie has eloped with the chauffeur, and they've borrowed your motor."

Mrs. Gray—The window in my hall has stained glass in it. Mrs. Green—Too bad! Can't you find anything that'll take the stains out?

Knick—How did that doctor build up such a good practise? Knack—Had moving pictures installed to amuse his patrons while they waited.

Gromwell (in cheap restaurant)—Here, waiter! Are these mutton or pork chops? Waiter—Can't you tell by the taste? Gromwell—No. Waiter—Then what difference does it make what they are?

A speeding automobile met a smoothly-gliding cutter on the road. "Ah!" it said to the cutter, "where are you going?" "Sleighing, of course," replied the cutter. "And you?" "Slaying!" shouted back the automobile with a horseless laugh.

Mr. Wise—I'm going to start you off with a bank account for a Christmas present. Mrs. Wise—But, Charlie dear, you forget that Christmas is a legal holiday, and the banks will be closed? I won't be able to draw the money out until the next day.

"Farm products cost more than they used to." "Yes," replied the farmer. "When a farmer is supposed to know the botanical name of what he's raising, and the zoological name of the insect that eats it, and the chemical name of what will kill it, somebody's got to pay."

Potter Palmer, hearing of the whereabouts of a guest who had decamped from the Palmer House without going through the formality of paying his bill, sent him a note: "Mr. ——. Dear Sir:—Will you send the amount of your bill, and oblige," etc. To which the delinquent replied: "The amount is \$13. Yours respectfully."

THE NEWS IN SHORT ARTICLES

BOY MAKES AUTOMOBILE.

Paul Edwards, 17 years old, who lives in Denver, Colo., has built an automobile for himself. He calls it a "trimobile," as it has three wheels, two in front and one at the rear. In other respects it looks like a regular racing car. The entire machine weighs only 410 pounds, about the weight of a motorcycle. The front wheels were constructed from remodeled wire wheels which had been used on an old electric car. The power consists of a 15-horsepower motorcycle engine, equipped with three speeds forward. The extremely low gear enables Paul to drive the car up any hill in Denver. Fifty miles an hour is easy for the "trimobile," Paul says, but he has not tried to make a speed record.

"I worked two months in a garage last summer so I would know something about automobiles before I started on this one," says Paul. "It took me only two weeks to make it. I had no idea I could do it in such a short time."

"TOMMY ATKINS."

There is an interesting story of how the British soldier got the name by which he is generally known, "Tommy Atkins." In the days when George III. was King, life in the ranks of the British army was very hard, and the men got little pay. Even as late as the nineteenth century soldiers' accounts were anything but well kept. Many of the men could not read and were dependent for their just dues on the honesty of their pay sergeant. Suddenly there arose a born accountant in the person of a gunner in the Royal regiment of artillery who was named Thomas Atkins. He soon became an object of admiration to his comrades and an object of awe to the pay sergeants. Even some of the officers at first regarded him with suspicion.

Gunner Atkins was, however, a decent fellow. He had proved himself a man of physical courage in the field and he soon earned the respect of his officers for his moral courage. He started a book in which he entered and balanced his accounts monthly, and so is believed to have originated the idea of the soldiers' pocket ledger, or, as it was called at first in the Royal artillery and afterward in the army generally, a "Tommy Atkins." Out of this grew the use of the word to describe the private soldier.

NOT TO BE TRUSTED WITH A PENCIL.

It would appear from an incident reported from Vienna that an Emperor is not to be trusted with a pencil. Some time ago, while holding court in the Royal Palace, says the Washington Star, Francis Joseph received a Hungarian blacksmith, who desired to thank his Majesty for the decoration conferred upon him in recognition of his having invented an agricultural machine. During the audience the blacksmith drew from his pocket a photograph of the Emperor, and, handing it to his Majesty, said:

"May I ask your Majesty for your autograph?"

"I cannot give you my autograph at the present moment," said Francis Joseph, with a smile, "for I have neither pen nor pencil within reach."

"I have brought a pencil with me," said the smith, handing it to the Emperor.

Francis Joseph thereupon attached his signature to the photograph and dismissed the smith with a smile and his customary inclination of the head. To the Emperor's surprise, the smith did not retire.

"Is there anything else I can do for you?" asked Francis Joseph.

"Yes, your Majesty, I am waiting for my pencil."

The Emperor of Austria-Hungary had mechanically pocketed it, and he returned it with a hearty laugh.

THE THUMB-PRINT SYSTEM.

The First National Bank of Cheyenne, Wyoming, has been compelled almost by necessity to adopt the thumb-print system as a means of identification, there being so many foreigners among its depositors who cannot even write their names legibly. The thumb-print system has in this case saved much trouble, and according to some of the members of the bank works perfectly.

Under the old system the filing of a new depositor's signature was required in order to identify his checks and detect a forgery, if one should be attempted. But the bank attaches were put to all kinds of trouble when many of their depositors placed signatures on file which would present to ordinary chirographical experts impossible problems.

The assistant cashier thought of the thumb-print idea and immediately put it into effect, with the result that the bank is not likely to change to the old system.

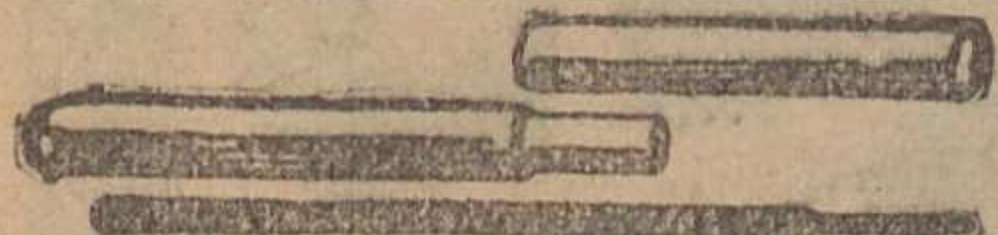
So to-day each foreign patron, when he makes his first deposit, is required to place his thumb on an inked pad and then make an impression on a card, which, with his ordinary signature and his name as written by the bank cashier, is deposited in the records of the bank. Whenever a check is presented drawn by this patron his thumb-print as well as his signature must appear upon it, and must correspond with that on the card in the record. If it does not so correspond the check is held up on suspicion.

Reading the thumb-prints is, in the beginning, not easy, but with daily practise it soon becomes easy. The assistant cashier of the Cheyenne bank has become so accomplished in reading the thumb marks of depositors that in many cases he does not have to refer to the cards in the records at all.

The thumb mark or print means of identification dates back to the old history of China, and it is surprising that an effort has not been made sooner to introduce this system in this country. True, it was suggested by a prominent man of science in England, some years ago, to have finger or thumb prints surplant or accompany signatures on checks or other important documents, but the plan was never adopted.

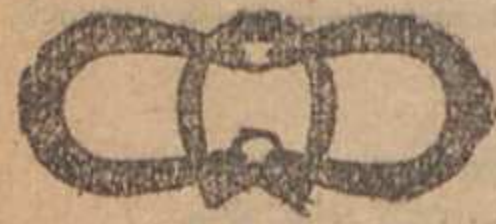
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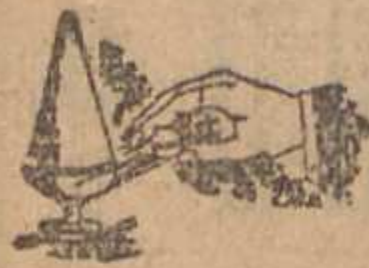
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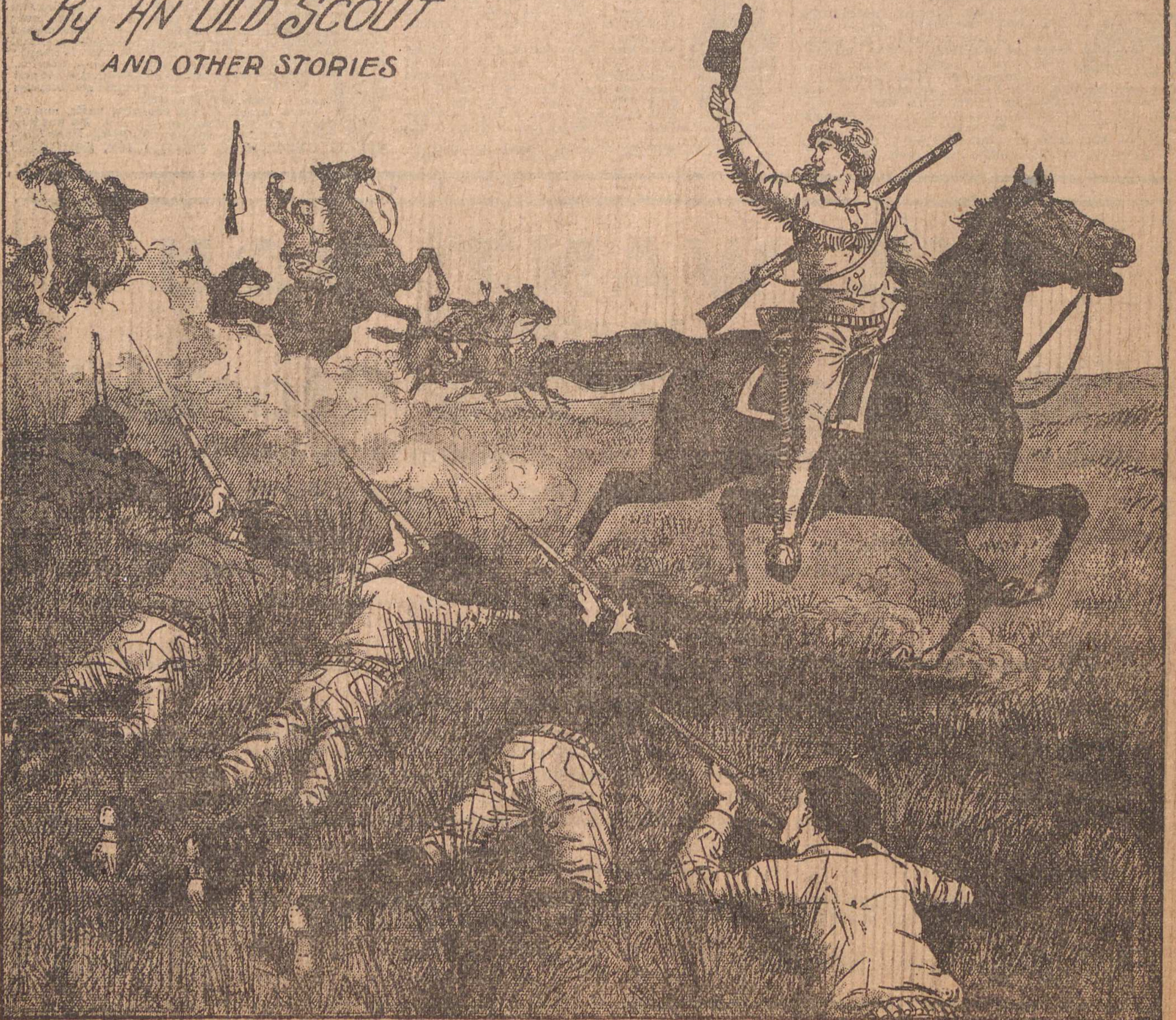
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